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A MOMENT OF TIME

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A
MOMENT OF TIME

by

RICHARD HUGHES



LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1926

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By the same Author

GIPSY-NIGHT & OTHER POEMS : *Golden Cockerel Press*, 1922; *out of print. Special hand-printed edition : Chicago, Will Ransom*, 1922.

THE SISTERS' TRAGEDY : *Oxford, Blackwell*, 1922.

POEMS BY JOHN SKELTON. Edited with an introduction and notes : *Heinemann*, 1924.

THE SISTERS' TRAGEDY & OTHER PLAYS (The Sisters' Tragedy, The Man Born to be Hanged, A Comedy of Good and Evil, Danger). *Heinemann*; *New York, Knopf*; 1924.

CONFESSIO JUVENIS: collected poems. *Chatto & Windus : Autumn*, 1925.

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10-29-46

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NOTE

My chief thanks are due to Miss N. G. Royde-Smith, who, when in command of the *Saturday Westminster*, was the first editor to print my stories. She has acted the part of god-mother to more young writers, probably, than any other contemporary editor; but that does not absolve me of the pleasant duty of recording my own particular gratitude.

Other stories have appeared in America in *Life* and the *Forum*, and in England in the *Manchester Guardian*, the *New Leader*, etc.; and some have been anthologized in *The Best Short Stories of* 1923, and in *Georgian Stories* 1925. To these editors also my thanks are due.

This is purely a work of fiction, and no reference is made, intended, or implied to any living person.

R. H.

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A MOMENT OF TIME

LOCHINVÁROVIČ: A ROMANTIC STORY

I

FOR weeks, often, after autumn has definitely taken hold of the Balkan uplands, summer still lingers on the low shores of the Adriatic. Even Trieste still keeps a semblance of summer: though Trieste is now far too melancholy a town to be able to do much with it. Up in the Giulian Alps it is almost winter: on the bare limestone levels of the Karst a steady and biting wind makes a real hardship of sleeping in the open: but once one has dived over the almost precipitous ledge of the plateau that overhangs the city one is once more able to feel the hot dust of the roadway blowing up against one's hands, and to sit for hours on the Mole, staring at the wish-wash of the sea—or at the other people sitting there staring.

But that is, really, another story: it is not my present purpose to explain why I found myself in Trieste. This story is concerned with a rather remarkable love-affair: of which I would have known nothing if it had not happened that I was practically destitute at that time. I took a bed in a common lodging-house, in a row of

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other beds, and used to buy my food cheap in the market—it was cheap because it certainly would not have been saleable the next day; and go to bed, as late as possible, in my clothes.

The end of it all was that I started off on a long expedition with Mitar Lochinvárovič: but we neither of us emerged from it much richer. It was his idea, and quite a good one: he was distinctly clever, and as loyal a friend as one could hope for, and a very good shot with an automatic, which he much preferred to a knife: but the whole thing broke down because his health was giving way; as generally comes sooner rather than later to men who lead such a hard life as he had led. Indeed, I doubt whether he is still alive. He had long ceased to draw any satisfaction from smoking, and, when I gave him a cigarette, used to rip it up with his thumb-nail and eat the tobacco. He had suffered from chronic heartburn for years, he told me: and unless he had plenty to drink his hand shook so that he could hardly control it.

His bed was next to mine: on the other side of me was a young Sudanese negro who was always too dead drunk to be of much use for social purposes. Mitar kept a walking-stick of Napoleon's under his bed, wrapped up in newspaper: and he showed it me one morning, by

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way of fraternization. The Emperor had sent it as a present to some Montenegrin lady: Mitar had kept the letter which accompanied it too. He never told me how he came by them: nor how he came by the Great Seal of that once-glorious rival to Venice, the Republic of Ragusa, which he carried in his waistcoat pocket. In another pocket of his waistcoat was some very old cheese, and some Greek and Roman coins. It is true that he had been a brigand when he was quite a lad, but I think he acquired these things later. Indeed, he did not make much out of brigandage, or he would not have become an ironmonger—which he did in desperation, he told me: despair of making a living by more normal means. But he presently gave up trade, and became a spy in the Turkish secret service. At last he was caught by the Greeks, court-martialled, and rather badly shot; so that he had a different scar to ache for every possible change in the weather. Indeed, for several years after his execution he was too crippled for a very active life. However, he managed to extract quite a creditable living from the white slave traffic which tided him over till the Great War came, when he obtained a responsible position in the administration of an American Relief Fund in the Balkans.

At the time I met him he had developed an

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excellent scheme for smuggling opium into the United States. It was very ingenious, because it was so contrived that there was no possible chance of getting imprisoned. The only difficulty lay in making the American buyer pay up. As a second string, he was blackmailing his brother-officers of the Relief Fund, who were mostly very well off by now.

But, in spite of all these resources, he had got himself landed in Trieste in a destitute condition. We used to go and sup together at a little slum wine-shop where he was allowed credit: and sit there afterwards drinking the filthy ink they call *Vino Nero* in Trieste: or *šljivovica*, which is a spirit extracted from plums. Sometimes he would pull out the Great Seal, and expatiate on the glories of the dead Republic: or tell rather fabulous stories about King Dukljan the First—who was, he explained, the earliest king there ever was in the world, and seemed somehow mixed up with Deucalion: or vague and misty stories about being shot and knifed and strangled and raped; or of having one's eyes put out before one was crucified, which is the Macedonian custom. But one evening he explored in the lining of his coat and brought out a woman's photograph, which he handed to me to look at.

It was a bad photograph, but it was enough

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to convince me that I had never seen so beautiful a woman; and probably never would see.

Mitar took it from my hands and stared at it doggedly. Then he hiccoughed, sighed, and replaced it in his pocket.

2

Love at first sight is a strange and beautiful invention of the Deity. It is curiously discrete: that is to say, it bears little relation or resemblance to anything else in the Universe: a kind of hint that God is not reasonable by necessity but because He prefers to be: an everlasting reminder of the sort of Universe He could have created had He preferred to be absurd. Of course, looking at it after the event, one can shake one's head and point out this or that reason why it should have occurred, contributive causes as it were: but one can never say that, given such and such circumstances, it *will* occur. One might shake one's head and say that, given an almost Oriental upbringing—in other words, having never seen any man except her father and brothers at close quarters—Natya was bound to fall head over heels with the first man she should meet: provided, of course, that he was not her lawfully intended husband. And yet one could not be sure. . . . Or one might say that, given such

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a beautiful girl as Natya, and given romantic circumstances, given sufficient difficulty in attaining her, an adventurous and inflammable man like Mitar was bound to fall in love with her the moment he saw her. One might go further: one might argue that, though Mitar can never have been in his person particularly striking, yet the glory of a perfectly colourless American uniform (for it was during the Relief Fund phase) would single him out to her from among the bright-coloured costumes she was used to. One might say that, while in her case she had seen so few men that she might fall in love with anyone, he had seen so many women that he would be able to appreciate how far above other women she was: that while her eye would have the primitive keenness of its appetite completely unspoilt, his would have the added and truer keenness of the connoisseur: like the man who found the treasure in the field, and sold all that he had to buy it.

Those, at any rate, are the arguments one *might* set out, if one was told that Mitar went to Natya's home to borrow a wheelbarrow in the name of the United States of America, and that by some incredible happening he was met at the door by Natya herself, eye to eye.

Mitar borrowed the wheelbarrow: and then, with all the dignity of an American officer in his

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bearing, trundled it off down the little sandy road to his quarters in the village of Dobruca.

Of course, it was not very long before Natya's mother guessed there was something in the wind. Young girls do not, except on the stage, lean out of their windows night after night talking only to the moon. However fond they may be of their houses and their gardens, they do not pour into the dark bushes beneath quite such a flood of endearments as Natya, constant-voiced as the nightingale, used to shower down into the darkness from her little casement each night. And if it had not been that the moonlight lit up the whole white wall of the house, so that if the mother had herself leant from her window she would have been visible from below, she might have heard that these outpourings were no mere monologue. Constant as the nightingale-song from above, there came from the bushes below a murmur like the unstillable sea, a thrilling voice that rose to Natya's window more persistently, more intoxicatingly, more overpoweringly than all the musky perfumes of the garden. If her mother had dared to lean out, she might have seen a little silk kerchief flutter down into the darkness, which Mitar caught and folded neatly, and placed in his pocket-book together with the notes he kept against a rainy day of his brother-officers' embezzlements. And

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presently she might have seen a long ribband let down, and then drawing up a small, heavy object tied to it—the Great Seal of the Republic of Ragusa, which Natya quickly hid between her two little breasts. Moreover, she could not fail to notice that Natya by day was changed: that when she should have been industriously embroidering shirts for her brothers, she used instead to lie on her back on her bed, staring vaguely at the ceiling and occasionally touching with the very tips of her fingers the little lump between her breasts.

No more could Major Thuddey fail to notice that Mitar was changed: that when he should have been standing in the hot sun distributing hand-knitted mittens to starving refugees, he would lie instead sound asleep in his bunk till nearly dusk.

You might have thought it was Major Thuddey's duty to reprimand Mitar—as it was certainly Natya's mother's duty to reprimand her daughter: but Major Thuddey was more than a little afraid of Mitar. Major Thuddey was an honest man: but he was also, in the American sense, an Idealist: the good name of his Relief Fund and of the United States was dear to him. He deprecated very much the way his subordinates had of selling to the refugees for their own pockets stores they were supposed to distribute

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free—but to bring dishonour on his country by exposing the practice was a crime to so good a patriot quite unthinkable. It was consequently a matter of considerable anxiety to him to notice that Mitar, whose Idealism he had no reason to respect and who was not an American Citizen, was scrupulously honest in all his dealings. He felt (and rightly) that the Good Name of America was somehow imperilled by this honesty: and though he had not the acumen to realize just how Mitar was investing his renunciation of his present chances for the support of his old age—though he did not suspect the existence of Mitar's little sheaf of notes, nor the use he intended to put them to—yet he could not but feel that the presence of a man as honest as himself but without his saving grace of Idealism was somehow dangerous; and, if Mitar lay abed and did nothing—well, all the better.

But Natya's mother had no such reason for silence: she took an early opportunity of coming into Natya's room, and sitting on Natya's bed, and telling her in as calm a voice as possible that all was discovered: that the young man would certainly be shot at the first opportunity. By this means she hoped to terrify the child into a complete confession that would include the identity of her lover: for all was *not* discovered:

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the old lady had not the least idea who the nightly visitant was: and it is difficult to arrange for the unobtrusive assassination of a man you have not yet identified. The course of laying an ambush and shooting him under her daughter's window was to be avoided if possible, owing to the way tongues would certainly wag: a dead man at such a time and in such a place would quite belie the proverb, would tell a very obvious tale.

Now at the calm way her mother exploded her bomb Natya, who had all a child's belief in the intuitive omniscience of its mother, was nearly terrified out of her young life: and the Great Seal of Ragusa, that before had almost seemed to flutter like a live bird against her skin, suddenly seemed to crush through her flesh like a mill-stone. She was seized with a lively sense of the futility of ever attempting to hide anything from one's mother, who knows everything about one by light of nature. But fortunately this sad conviction did not prevent her lying to her mother with skill and coolness. Although having no hope whatever of success, she lied as a matter of principle. Her mother, who had started so calmly, not through calmness of nature, but because she had an unconscious appreciation of the value of crescendo when making a scene, gradually increased in fury and sound: and as

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her passion increased her discretion decreased: until Natya, while outwardly growing more and more stricken by her mother's wrath, inwardly became more and more elated: for she soon discovered that in the first place her mother did not know who her visitor was: and in the second that her father had not yet been told, but only was about to be. She resolved immediately that wild horses should not drag her lover's name from her; but at the same time she realized what a valuable weapon it was, in making terms for herself; by mildness, tempered by maidenly grief and pity—by abandonment of all defiance, and promising always to reveal the great secret in a day or two—she might get the game into her own hands: for as long as they thought they were likely to worm her lover's name out of her, so long would they be unable to take drastic measures on her own person.

Quite suddenly, the storm ceased: long before it had run its natural course. Possibly there was enough foundation for Natya's belief in her mother's intuition for the latter to have realized that her wrath was not having the effect it appeared to have, but that inwardly Natya was greatly cheered by it. So she too dissolved in tears, and kissed her daughter very lovingly, and told her in a sad, melancholy way what

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rosy hopes she had for her future. This was more than poor Natya had bargained for: she was still a child in many ways, and it was difficult to harden herself against the fountain-head of all the love she had ever known: far harder than to harden herself against the same person when regarded simply as the fountain-head of Authority. However, for the time being she succeeded; and her mother left her at last, bearing away no more information than she brought with her. Indeed, she had only shown her own hand, and consequently had little hope even of taking the young man in an ambush: for she was sensible enough to realize that if Natya were locked up in an iron box and she sat on the lid day and night, the girl would still find some means of conveying a warning to her lover. And so she left, somewhat downcast, but subconsciously determined, if need should arise, to worry herself on to a sick-bed. If her little Natya could stand against that, she reflected, she was not her little Natya.

She did not consider that little Natya was no longer wholly and only *her* little Natya.

As she expected, Natya immediately set about sending a message to her lover, to warn him of the danger of coming to see her. "*Dear One,*" she began to compose in her head, "*you must never try and see me again, or you will certainly*

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be shot." In her heart of hearts she was singularly well pleased: this was a love-affair with a vengeance! And then her blood ran cold: suppose her hero laughed at warnings, and came, and was shot dead from a window as cats are shot when they yowl in the night? And then her blood ran colder: suppose he took her warning, and never *did* come to see her again? Both possibilities were equally unthinkable; *ergo*, she would not think of them. She went on composing her message in her head.

She had wholly overlooked till this moment one sovereign fact. Wild horses certainly could not drag his name from her, for she did not know it! Among all the hundred thousand things she had said to him, she had entirely forgotten to ask him who he was. And therefore she could not send him a message: for she could hardly write a letter to be pinned up in the American Mess, a sort of Battalion Orders:

"*Officers will cease to visit Natya Perunič by night, as arrangements have been made to assassinate them. . . .*"

So, though her brain went round in her head like a wheel, no way of identifying him could she contrive. Well, it could not be helped: he must come once more, and take his chance. After all, it was quite impossible that so glorious and wonderful a person as he was could be laid

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low by an ordinary bullet: love-stories simply do not end that way. And, at any rate, it removed the awful possibility of his *not* coming at all.

But Natya, with her mind full of these stupendous happenings and her heart bubbling over with its single stupendous emotion, little knew what a matter of touch-and-go it was whether she would ever see Mitar again. I have shown in an entirely convincing fashion how certain it was that these two should fall in love with each other. So convincing, indeed, were the arguments that Mitar never had the least doubt about it: it was, he realized, quite inevitable that he should fall in love with Natya: for he had a logical mind, as well as considerable experience of the subject, and always bowed to the dictates of his reason. Natya might fall in love without in the least knowing why: but for Mitar, who did know why and fully acquiesced in it, assurance was doubly sure. It was accordingly without the least hesitation that he flung himself into the affair, with absolute singleness of mind, absolute conviction of the stupendous nature of his own emotions. Each night, as he thrilled to the very core at the recital of his own devotion, it became more and more plain to him that he could not fail to be madly in love with this marvellous creature, whose passion for him

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was so wonderful and so complete. So that when his Heart every now and then protested somewhat grumpily that it was not in love with her in the least, his Head told it quite flatly that it did not know what it was talking about: that it was in love with her without knowing it: that it *knew* it was in love with her and was simply being contrary: that outsiders see most of the game, and that it lay with Head, as an intelligent spectator, to decide whether Heart was in love, not with Heart itself at all: that presently Heart would be repenting its wilfulness in the flames of such a consuming passion as it had never felt before.

But still Heart protested, with all the obstinacy of which that organ is capable, that it was not in love with Natya Perunič.

Whereupon Head, realizing the futility of logical argument, tried to work upon Heart's feelings. It, Head, had done everything for Heart the latter could wish: had even sacrificed time that should have been given to the elaboration of that little note-book: had risked career, personal safety,—everything, in its readiness to follow the dictates of Heart: and now Heart repaid it by having no dictates at all!

But still Heart persisted that that was as it might be, but that it was not in love with Natya Perunič.

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Very well then, said Head, your obstinacy has got us into the soup. For that we have between us worked the poor girl into a pretty state of passion there can be no doubt. An organ of your sensibility surely cannot propose that we should now desert her. All I ask of you is to suspend judgment. We owe it to her to go through with this business as we have begun: and I have no doubt whatever that the time will come when you will thank me, when you will be madly in love with her, and will be extremely grateful that I have refused to listen to you now.

That is as it may be, replied Heart: the future is not my province and you can act as you like: my only duty is to record the state of my feelings at the present moment, and the long and the short of it is, that I am not in love with Natya Perunič.

—It must not be supposed that this dialogue actually took place, or that Mitar argued it out clearly at all: it is simply an analysis for the reader's benefit of the generally uneasy state of mind in which he found himself; now deciding to carry her off to the other side of the world, now deciding never to go near her again; and absolutely refusing to admit to himself that he was not in love with Natya Perunič.

Moreover, it was only natural that to a man

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of his matured senses there should be something unsatisfactory in such a love-making, with the two persons as securely separated by the barrier of ten vertical feet of air as they would have been by ten horizontal feet of adamant.

It was therefore, as I have said, touch-and-go whether Natya would ever see her ardent lover again: just as it was touch-and-go whether *he* would ever see the light of day again if she did. But it was inevitable that in a man of Mitar's type, as the reader will have guessed from the details of his past and his future which I have given, that unselfishness should ultimately conquer: that the thought of leaving a girl so extremely lovely to pine for him unrequited would be ultimately put out of court. One must, on these occasions, occasionally sacrifice one's own feelings. Accordingly, before setting out he provided himself with a rope long enough and strong enough to overcome the ten-foot airy barrier he found so irksome; and resolved to see Natya Perunič once and for all.

The next night, then, found him once more at his place in the bushes, bubbling his devotions into the air like a garden fountain, where they met and mingled with the sighs and protestations of the maiden so far over his head: for just as he found it quite impossible to tell her

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(so unselfish he was) that all he said was said, so to speak, through his hat, so Natya, in *her* unselfishness, found it quite impossible to shatter his happiness (and interrupt the flow) by rude news of the imminent personal danger to which it exposed him.

Mitar, with the whole night before him and a nice sense of the pleasures of anticipation, was in no hurry to broach his project: and so an hour passed, and still the rope remained coiled under his coat.

But at length he resolved to act: and without for a moment interrupting the scintillation of his love-making, uncoiled it, ready to throw.

And now at last little Natya leant from the window as far as she could, hands outstretched to catch the line: and Mitar stood below, in act to throw.

A large and quite unprepossessing hand appeared in the moonlight over Natya's head, and twined itself very firmly in her hair. One tug, one scream—and where before her arms and cheek had gleamed in the moonlight, now nothing was visible except the spouts of two rifles, that poked out a few inches from the sill like the little lead cistern-overflow pipes in the wall of an English villa. Nor were they long in discharging their accumulation of wrath into the garden: and very near that cat came, who had so long

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yowled unmolested through the night, to a mortal soaking.

But Mitar was more adapted to making quick decisions, acting on the merits of the situation without undue delay, than are most officials in charge of the distribution of charitable funds. At the first gleam of those fingers in the moonlight, Mitar, all his eloquence checked, was crawling away on his stomach through the shrubbery, dragging his ridiculous ten-foot tail wriggling behind him.

3

After this incident, it was only natural that Head should somewhat weaken in the opposition it raised to Heart. It is all very well to run risks when one is madly infatuated: but deliberately to get oneself shot in a shrubbery in the cause of an Unselfishness that amounted to little more than a point of punctilio is altogether absurd: while the sole very moderate personal satisfaction with which Mitar had intended to reward himself could be purchased in any town of considerable size with perfect safety for about four *lire*. And it only shows the perverseness of Heart, that it, too, began to weaken in its opposition to Head: that after a week of enforced separation it was no longer at all so firm in its conviction

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that it was not in the least in love with Natya Perunič.

However, in this contest of adaptability to the opposite point of view, it was Head which ultimately carried the day, being even more ready to give up the whole affair than Heart was to continue it. It is highly probable that the two lovers would never have seen each other again if it had not been for Zdenka: who now enters the story in the rôle of Fairy Godmother, or *Diabolus ex machina*, whichever way you like to look at it. Zdenka was the assistant in the photographic studio which some enterprising person had established in Dobruca. It was only a small wooden shanty, but excellently equipped: being furnished with a red plush sofa, a plaster balustrade with no behind to it, a white calico screen, and a monochrome landscape background of Fifth Avenue.

There was, of course, no camera. On its first establishment it had actually done a little business with the American Relief-workers: but after they had been photographed in every possible position, and in every combination and permutation of grouping, business languished. Most of the villagers, after being photographed at one age in one position, made that last a lifetime. In consequence, the proprietor had been compelled to dismount his machine from its com-

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plicated stand, and now earned a precarious living by touring the country, photographing atrocities for sale to the propaganda departments of all the belligerent governments; and also by photographing politicians surrounded by thousands of their supporters, which they bought by the gross at little more than cost price to distribute among their opponents. Meanwhile Zdenka remained in charge of the studio: nominally, at any rate, to make appointments for the proprietor, if ever he should happen to pass that way.

It will therefore be seen that Zdenka, being a New Woman with a profession of her own, possessed a great deal more freedom of movement than a nicely brought up girl like Natya would ever be allowed. Hitherto, Natya had felt nothing but contempt for those hoydens who struggled in the outer darkness of life, instead of vegetating in the inner light of seclusion: her attitude towards Zdenka had been friendly, but decidedly superior; but now she found herself greatly envying that freedom which formerly had so shocked her. For it must not be imagined that having her hair nearly pulled out by the roots was the chief of the unpleasantnesses she had to endure during the next few days: and if her family failed to proceed to extreme measures, it was only for two reasons. In the first place,

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they had still failed to identify her lover, and still hoped to worm the secret out of her: in the second, it was less than a month now from the date of her wedding, and it is unbecoming in a bride to be black and blue.

Although this matter of her wedding certainly saved Natya from a good deal of physical discomfort, she nevertheless found herself anticipating it with more and more annoyance. Under ordinary circumstances it would have seemed to her quite in the course of nature that she should be married to a man she had never seen: but now she found herself regarding the prospect almost with aversion.

For the betrothal customs of Western and Eastern Europe, although they coincide in the main, have one important difference. It is a matter of philosophy, the opposition of the Idealistic and the Realistic. In Eastern Europe, when a girl is still a very small child, her parents choose for her a husband, and the betrothal is fixed: and this may be said for the plan, that if the girl has never seen her intended husband, at least her parents have. But in Western Europe, while she is still a child, or even before she is born, her parents choose for her an imaginary husband, and, in their minds, betroth her to him quite as irrevocably as do Balkan parents: an Idea, say, of a sober business man, handsome

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but steady, clever at his work but without any taint of Inquiry in his mind. So that in Western Europe, when the child-betrothal takes place, not only has the girl never seen her intended husband, but her parents have not either.

In Natya's case, it was a prominent director of the Eskomptne Banke at Zagreb to whom she was betrothed: a man of quite respectable means, and some intelligence, and a fair allowance of years, called Dr. Pedar Srdič: and it was very wrong of Natya to repine against so excellent a husband.

Nevertheless, an almost unheard-of project began to suggest itself to her. She would run away with Mitar to America.

For several days after that disgraceful incident of course she was not allowed to see anyone at all: but it was not long before she obtained leave to see her friend Zdenka: and it was not long before Zdenka, having with difficulty identified him, began to pass on mysterious messages to Mitar. They proved very disturbing to his peace of mind: for he had hardly come to the decision never to see Natya again when those devoted little communications from her began to leak through, telling him how she languished, what she suffered for his sake: begging him to come and see her once again, if only *once*: messages which almost fired him

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to forget his new resolution. But each time when he almost decided to go, the memory of those two little overflow pipes projecting from the wall was too much for him : try as he would, he could not go. Meanwhile, he was quite sensible of a new danger : if he did not go, Zdenka might suspect him of being a coward, and a deceiver : and if she got angry with him, she might give away the whole affair to Natya's parents—which would be disastrous. In consequence, he took the most elaborate pains with his excuses, and made them so specious and convincing that for a time they failed to arouse the suspicions not only of the ingenuous Natya, but even of the more worldly-wise Zdenka.

It is improbable, however, that this could have lasted : the crisis would have been bound to be precipitated, were it not for a fortunate occurrence. A fortnight before her marriage, Natya got leave to go and be photographed. The proprietor was spending a few hours in Dobruca to collect some plates which Zdenka had developed : and an appointment was arranged. Zdenka hurried with the news to Mitar. So he was concealed in a cupboard, ready to step out the moment the proprietor left. Small wonder if Natya were even more nervous than girls usually are, when they pose for their photographs—knowing that Mitar was watching

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her through the keyhole of the tall cupboard in the corner. As a matter of fact, he was not: the cupboard was so tightly sealed that he put his nose, not his eye, to the only aperture.

But at last the sitting was over, and the proprietor bundled out of the studio, and Zdenka on guard at the door: and on the red plush sofa, witnessed only by the plaster balustrade that had no behind and the faint, fantastic shadow of Fifth Avenue, Mitar and Natya conducted their first proper love-making.

As soon as she was able sufficiently to collect her wits, Natya broke to Mitar the news that she intended to elope with him. He was to come once more with his rope to her window, but in perfect silence this time: she would climb down, and together they would fly to America.

When she first told him of her imminent marriage, he was torn by conflicting emotions, unable to decide whether he was more desolated to lose her or more rejoiced at this ready-made solution of a position grown impossible: but when she suggested elopement, his mind was made up at once: duly and firmly married to Dr. Srdič she must be! This did not, of course, prevent him welcoming the notion with every expression of joy: and by the time their short hour was up, he had promised to make all

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arrangements for flight and to call for Natya within the next three days.

Needless to say, he did not.

Now for the first time Zdenka began to reproach him. But there were so many difficulties, he urged: and plenty of time, plenty of time: Natya would not be married for a whole week: or later, for three days: at length, even:

"Why, she will not be married till to-morrow! What more suitable night than to-night to carry her off?"

Zdenka shook her head, unappeased. She had by now more than grave doubts of Mitar's intentions: she urged him at least to go and see the poor girl once more, even if he could not save her from the imminent ceremony.

"Why, of course I shall," he answered. "I shall go to-night, with my rope, and have a car waiting . . . after to-night, you will never hear of either of us again!"

But Zdenka still shook her head: and Mitar, feeling himself to be quite unconvincing, went out and got very drunk indeed, in order to forget all about it.

4

The wedding procession started out the next morning at six: and Natya, who had sat the whole night by her window in growing despair,

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looked the most pinched and peaked and hollow-eyed and unhappy young bride. Dr. Srdič was second cousin to a bishop, and so it was towards the little cathedral city of Vojvdo that the wedding procession set out so early, laughing and chaffing, with the prospect of half a day's drive through the mountains ahead of them, and much merrymaking at the end of it, and a return in the evening. They passed up the street of Dobruca, the highly decorated little carts jingling as they went, the men calling and guffawing, the women singing and giggling, the bride quietly sobbing to herself. They passed right under Mitar's window: but he was far too sound asleep to be woken by so slight a disturbance. He slept on, the deep and innocent sleep of the intoxicated.

When he did wake, his head was awful. It was nine o'clock. The blinding sun shone straight in at his window. He sat up, clutching at his brows. (It is an unjust God who has decreed that man should purchase oblivion and irresponsibility at such a price.) His skull seemed to come to pieces in his hands, like a cup in the grasp of a housemaid. It was agony. It felt as if someone with a Victorian sense of humour had wittily attempted to saw his head in two while he slept: and, being surprised at the task, had left his saw wedged in the cleft.

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Mitar pressed his hands to his eyeballs and staggered across the room, groping for his belt and boots. Then out into the blinding street and across to the café, where he sank into a little green chair, and ordered a whole bottle of šljivovica—by way of a hair of the dog that had bitten him.

Ten o'clock. Natya would have started four hours ago.

For a moment the pain lulled, and when it lulled he began to remember, which was highly annoying. He tackled the šljivovica seriously, determined that the return of the wedding party should find him as paralytically unconscious and incapable as had its departure.—But, after all, why should he worry? Brazen little minx! It had all been on her side, she had entrapped him: he had never been in love with her in the least: and hadn't he nearly got himself shot, just to gratify her whims? His hair bristled uncomfortably at the thought of her two fierce brothers, their incredibly long moustaches, those two little overflow pipes. *Question:* What right has a girl to fall in love with a man? *Answer:* None, if it is going to cause him danger and inconvenience.

That gave place to a more placid mood, in which he congratulated himself on the part he had played: management of a difficult situation

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which for skill, tact, and moral rectitude could hardly be excelled. He really came out of it all very well.

Gradually his headache softened under the bite of the spirit: and soon everything receded from him in a beatific way, just as the world of sense *ought* to recede from a spiritual man. He gradually melted into the Infinite—already his bodily senses were left behind, or at any rate all mixed up: so that the little green tables of the café only penetrated to him as a tinkling arpeggio to the blaring bass of the sunlight, the booming sky outside: while the rattle of a passing bullock-cart was translated into a series of vivid flashes of colour, and the discomfort of the rickety chair he sat on smelt bitter in his nostrils.

But something was pushing him, shoving up against him, prodding him in his Nirvana. That was monstrous! He pulled himself together, just enough to ascertain through which of his senses the attack was really directed. Finally, he traced it to his ears: yes, someone was shouting at him. And his bottle had been removed.

With great difficulty he focused his eyes on the scene around him: and at last discovered Zdenka, standing over him, covering him with abuse from head to foot.

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But she did more than that. Seizing a carafe of iced water from a table near by, she poured half of it over his head: and then deliberately tipped the rest, lumps of ice and all, down the back of his neck, holding away the collar of his tunic with her hand.

The remedy was drastic, but it certainly made him better able to listen to what she had to say. He even succeeded in asking her what the devil she meant by it.

"You wicked liar, making poor little Natya fall in love with you! *You*, to promise to run away with her, and then to sit there drinking like an owl while the poor child is being married to old Srdič! You, to call yourself a brigand! You, to call yourself an officer! You, to call yourself a male man at all!"

"But, my dear little girl, what is all the fuss? You don't dare to suggest I'm a coward, that I'm not going to run away?"

"But, you great embroidered he-liar, she's half-way to Vojvdo by now!"

"There's plenty of time, my child, plenty of time. She won't be married for a couple of hours yet. Must have a drink, before starting!"

"But she's twenty miles ahead of you by now!"

"There's plenty of time! . . . Overtakings are in the Hands of God!"

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He staggered out of his chair: he had caught sight of one of the Relief Fund Fords, which Major Thuddey had left standing outside the mess with the engine running. As he climbed into the driver's seat he turned to repeat solemnly to the astonished Zdenka:

"*In the Hands of God . . .*"

Then he accidentally trod on the gear-pedal, and began zigzagging erratically up the street in low gear, like a lamed rocket, clinging sideways to the steering-wheel.

What the ice down his back had begun, the fresh air continued. By the time he had destroyed a fruit-stall, and left a mudguard as a sort of pious offering on the corner of the church, he was beginning to drive fairly creditably: at any rate, he sat facing in the right direction, and had succeeded in getting into top gear. Moreover, he had all the drunk man's feeling of confidence in his own skill: he felt that never had he driven so well before. He also had the drunk man's luck: for he drove as hard as he could pelt and missed destruction by inches, yet, for the present at any rate, missed it.

Soon he was eating up the miles to Vojvdo: and all the fire in his blood was stirred at his romantic quest. *Natya! Natya!* Her name sang in his ears like a choir of birds. Her lovely face danced in front of him all up the road.

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Gone was his terror for her villainous brothers, her father, the whole pack of them! He would snatch her from them, carry off his beloved from the altar steps: true love and constancy, youth and the beautiful dreams of youth should conquer in the end, as they always conquered. His name would go down to posterity among the names of Great Lovers: his exploit would be celebrated in poems and plays, along with the heroic elopements of antiquity.

As, indeed, leaving out the little matter of his mental indecision, of which no one need ever know: leaving out the part played by Zdenka with the carafe of iced water, and the amount of stimulant he had consumed before starting on his heroic expedition, and various details of his private life (such as the little note-book), all of which a romantic writer with an eye to a good story would quite certainly suppress: taking the plain, staring facts of the story and asking no awkward questions about mental processes: employing, in short, an artist's undoubted Right of Selection—there was no reason whatever why it should not.

Who knows why Paris ran off with Helen, or what crossed Leander's mind as he swam the Hellespont? Who would be fool enough not to accept these stories at their face value, when their face value was so stirring? Then who

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would dare to suggest that Mitar, who had braved death to visit his Natya, and now charged recklessly across the mountains to snatch her from the altar steps, was not the most romantic lover of them all?

For it must not be imagined that there was anything comic in the turn affairs had taken. Mitar might be drunk, but he was not ignorant of the difficulty of his task: and being accustomed to danger, he had also a remarkable power of forcing his mind to sober itself when action was necessary. To carry Natya off from her own house would have been comparatively easy: to carry her off at the church door, when all the wedding guests would have rifles, and would certainly shoot him at sight if they had the least inkling that he was Natya's anonymous lover, was a very serious matter, requiring all the daring and all the coolness he could muster. That it was *l'amour propre* rather than *l'amour* which prompted the adventure did not affect its *dangerousness* a whit. Mitar was no romantic townling, battened on picture-plays and fiction magazines, he was a man who all his life had lived face to face with danger: and if that gave him the necessary practice and skill with which alone such an enterprise could be successfully carried out, it also meant that he knew very well how difficult it all was. As he drove his

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Ford for all it was worth in the direction of Vojvdo he knew, with a certainty no mere amateur adventurer could have had, how slender were the chances of his ever coming back alive.

And yet he was still so drunk that he could hardly cling to the wheel.

Poor Natya! She had almost given up hope. As the cathedral drew nearer, hope sank lower: she began to envisage the old bishop as if he were some kind of inexorable ogre. Presently the whole party stopped at a little wayside inn, for lunch: dived under the low, vine-covered door, and grouped themselvs formally round the bare trestle tables. Natya tried to eat with the rest: but all the time her eye was fixed on the door, or on the window. She hardly heard what they said to her. *He cometh not!*

And yet, what would be the good? Could he venture right into the lion's den?

A long-drawn-out grinding squeak proclaimed that a car had pulled up outside: and presently the door was darkened by the figure of an American officer. Natya dropped her spoon, gazing a moment with popping eyes. Then she recovered herself. No one had noticed. Mitar came in and sat down in a corner, and ordered food.

Natya could not bear to look at him. He had come! But why had he come? Was it to

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gaze his last at her? Or was it to carry her off? And why was he pretending to be drunk? Was that a piece of cunning on his part?

So the meal went on: the wedding party eating heartily, Natya eating nothing at all, Mitar eating as well as the state of his stomach would allow.

It was over. The wedding party adjourned to their carts. Mitar did not move: he sat there, as if there was no hurry: and never once looked at Natya.

So that *looking* could not be his purpose in coming.

It was not till they were mounting once more into their seats that they discovered how near an accident they must have been. The axle-pin had come out of the wheel of one of the carts, the wheel itself had been wrenched crooked by the strain. The whole party conferred over it a while, and came to the conclusion that nothing could be done: the vehicle must be left behind. But all the other carts were packed: what about its passengers?

They looked round, and there was the American officer's motor-car; and inside the inn the American officer was dawdling over his lunch.

The solution was obvious; so old Perunič, Natya's father, took the negotiations on his own shoulders. He wandered aimlessly back

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into the inn: began an aimless conversation with the innkeeper; aimlessly trod on Mitar's toe, and overwhelmed himself with apologies. From that to an equally aimless conversation with the stranger was a short step: and purely in order to make conversation, he recited the story of their mishap. Mitar, who knew perfectly well what was coming, was laconic, and no more helpful than necessary: and it must be confessed that though he expressed sympathy at the mishap, inwardly it caused him little surprise. . . . So, when the moment was ripe, he suggested that, as he also was going to Vojvdo to buy eggs for the Relief Fund, could he give any of them a lift? Would the bride and her mother honour him?

The old man was grateful and astonished: such an idea would never have entered his head, but since the nobleman was so kind . . .

He went out to tell the others of his success: and Natya, with as little haste as she could contrive, began to climb down again from her seat. Meanwhile they were stripping the derelict vehicle of its decorations, and draping the old Ford in proper bridal manner, to take its place in the procession: while Mitar stood in the door of the inn with a bored and superior, if still rather intoxicated, air.

All were ready to start: all but the bride's

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mother, who still sat in her cart. So they explained to her that she was to ride in the car. Now, whether her famous intuition had begun to work, or whether it was sheer fright, I do not know: but she flatly refused. She never had ridden in a car, and she never would ride in a car: they were inventions of the devil as well as being highly unsafe: and to be terrified out of her life on the day of her daughter's wedding was not at all her idea of pleasure. Why, she would hardly feel Natya was properly married if the girl rode to her wedding in such a thing! (As, indeed, was highly probable.) In short, she refused outright: and there was nothing for it but for Natya to climb down yet again, and back into the cart: and instead of being able to carry off his lady, Mitar had to be content to take his place meekly in her wedding procession, with four of the bridegroom's caterwauling younger brothers in the car beside him. So do the plans, even of Heroic Lovers, gang all awry.

How often it is that our patron saint looks after us in a way that at first makes us livid with rage—only afterwards we realize his kindly offices, and are properly grateful! As they left the little inn, Mitar inwardly abused his patron by every name his spiritual tongue could curl round. But as they neared Vojvdo, sobriety gradually returned to him, and he was overcome

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with astonishment at the part he had set out to play. *He*, to run off with another man's affianced bride! And she a girl with whom he was not in love in the least! All because of the sharp tongue of a wretched photographer's assistant. He thanked his saint with proper fervour, as they entered the narrow streets of Vojvdo, for saving him from so monstrous and so extremely unsafe an act: and he deposited the wedding guests at the door of the cathedral with all unction, promising to call for them in a couple of hours, while he set off to the market to buy two gross of excusatory eggs.

If one were buying two gross of eggs for oneself in the market of Vojvdo, two hours would certainly not be enough for the necessary bargaining: but buying them with public money was a different matter, and in less than thirty minutes they were all stowed in the bedizened Ford, and Mitar found himself with nothing to do. For a moment he thought of going to the cathedral to see the wedding; but his innate tact revolted against this. Moreover, he reflected, the actual ceremony would be over by now. Then he thought longingly of the wedding feast: so longingly that he turned into a little Gostilna, determined to celebrate the occasion of Natya's wedding by himself, over a bottle or two of his favourite liqueur.

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But as the flames of the habitual šljivovica mounted to his head, they wrought a decided change of mind. In the first place, it is well known that intoxication, like sleep, loosens the tongue of the subconscious: and deep in his subconscious, however positively Head and Heart might agree to the contrary, there lurked a certain regret for the lovely girl (call it love or not as you like, for the stirrings of the subconscious are used to hard names, by now). In the second place, a man may get drunk overnight and drunk again the morning after without much happening: but if he deliberately gets drunk the following afternoon as well, something is bound to give, somewhere: discretion and reason go completely by the board, and whether he wins the Victoria Cross, or finds himself sentenced to several years' hard labour, or matter for the sexton, will be purely a question of the circumstances in which he is situated.

All this Mitar should have known, and gone easy with the bottle: but he did not go easy, and that is how it came to pass that his ambition to become the subject of song and story was fulfilled. By the time he went to pick up the returning wedding guests they were fairly uproariously drunk: but *he* was drunk with a superlative drunkenness, as different from theirs as cheese from chalk: a cold, mad drunkenness,

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that left him fairly well able to walk and talk, but cut off all memory and all prescience as with a knife: he had no Past and no Future, only a vivid Present with which he grappled with the energy of a tiger. I have seen a man in this state make his teeth meet through another man's leg: I have myself walked round a high building on a lead gutter that sagged in festoons under my weight. But it is rare, this true Bacchic frenzy: and only those who have seen it can realize how far removed from the ordinary puerile bravado of intoxication it is.

But of all this Mitar, as is the way in such cases, gave no hint till the moment was ripe. They were on the homeward journey, the narrow road passing between the rock and a terrific precipice. Mitar had drawn a little ahead of the others with his four young men, and as he rounded a bend he suddenly drew up. Then he pulled out a couple of automatics, and covering his astonished passengers with one hand, trained the other on the bend behind him; determined to shoot, if necessary, the whole wedding party, thirty or forty of them.

As the first cart came in sight, he fired. His aim, always good, was now deadly. Three men dropped. The horses were mad with confusion: other men sprang to their heads to force them back into cover. Mitar fired again. A rifle

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volley replied: but they aimed high in order to miss their relatives in the back seat. And Mitar volleyed another three or four shots. Then silence: his clip was empty. He lifted his other gun, alternately firing and covering the terrified four, all the while feeling desperately in his pocket for a spare clip to charge his empty gun. He was not firing aimlessly, be it understood: Natya, her mother, and the other women were as safe as they had been when in the cathedral itself: but one man after another dropped on the narrow road. Only Dr. Srdič himself, lying flat on his stomach at his bride's feet, Mitar could not reach.

By the time he had fired his last shot, the two families of Perunič and Srdič were both reduced by about one half, but if anything the family of Perunič had suffered most. In order to redress the balance, Mitar loosened the brake, and deliberately drove his car with himself and his four passengers straight over the edge of the cliff.

But his patron saint, who had formerly saved him from indiscretion, now saved him in indiscretion. As the car heeled over sideways he was flung out, and somehow caught with both hands at a tamarisk bush some four feet below the edge. But the bestreamered car and the four young men and the two gross of eggs turned over and over and over on their eight-hundred-foot

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drop into the ravine beneath. As he hung there, Mitar bitterly regretted those eggs. . . . But then, he reflected, one cannot make so grand an omelette without the breaking of eggs.

As the astonished wedding party craned their necks over the cliff, they were just in time to see the Ford, now grown minute and distant, come finally to rest. But they did not see a pair of hands twined firmly in a tamarisk bush a few feet below their noses.

Presently they went on their way—considerably chastened in their merrymaking, it is true; but it must not be imagined that the incident seemed to them so unusual, or of quite so much importance, as it would to the guests at one of our Western weddings. Only Dr. Srdič himself, who, from his many years as a Zagreb banker, had grown used to ways of comparative security, considered it a matter of great import. He had always wondered what to do with his four turbulent younger brothers.

5

It must be confessed, against Natya's count, that she did not treat her husband with that politeness or consideration one civilized being owes to another: let alone a wedded wife to her husband. Once she had ensconced herself in

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her bedroom, she produced a small but very sharp stiletto of Sheffield steel, and told him she would kill him if he came inside the door. She was wild with grief and love at Mitar's heroic end, and determined to have her cry out in private, without the intrusion of a husband.

Pedar Srdič was not very much impressed by her stiletto, for there are more ways than one of disarming a woman: but his residence in Zagreb, and contact with that Western world whose outpost it was, had taught him that the marriage customs of his native country were more than a little barbarous: and though he had followed them in form (for he was a true conservative), he was quite ready, now that Natya and he were married, to give her time for them to get acquainted—even to go through an abridged form of courtship—in deference to Western opinion. He was quite prepared to let her have her own wilful way; say, for three days, by which time, if she did not surrender willingly, his conscience would no longer reproach him for taking his rights by force: one day for them to get to know each other, one for him to make love to her, and one for her to fall in love with him: it was a generous allowance.

Meanwhile Natya sat on her bed day and night, without food or sleep, nursing her little steel

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imp, with which she more than once decided to kill herself. Of this Srdič had no inkling: for it had not occurred to Natya's mother—let alone her husband, who, of course, had not been told—to connect the uncertain temper of the American officer in the Ford with Natya's secret love-affair. They all put it down to the natural vagaries of a man who had taken too much to drink, and thought no more about it.

Two days passed, and time brought no alleviation to Natya's sorrow. Two days, and still she loved Mitar, still mourned his death in the abysm of despair. Pedar's programme had to be abandoned, owing to her peevish conduct; for when he came to the door she used to go to the window and threaten to throw herself down into the stone courtyard below, if he so much as entered the room. Love-making, and even acquaintance, were thus indefinitely postponed: till presently Pedar lost his temper and told her that if she could not even treat him with common politeness she should get no more law, but be strapped to the bed.

Natya, being no more moved by his threats than his cajoleries, determined at last to make an end of herself: life without Mitar was unbearable, life with Pedar was unbearable, life must end. Perhaps she might be allowed to meet her lover in purgatory: indeed, her only dread was

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that so angelic a man could scarcely be kept there for more than a week or two at most: she shuddered to think of the æons she might have to spend there alone.

And so the story winds to a tragic close, for Mitar, that she believed dead, was alive and well: and even now making plans for her ultimate abduction.

There were many reasons why he had not acted at once, on his return to Dobruca. In the first place, it took a couple of days' sleep to restore him to passable health. In the second, he had to explain to Major Thuddey the loss of the car and the eggs—but Major Thuddey was so used, by now, to fantastic explanations of the "loss" of government property that it was not a very difficult matter. And in the third place, it took him a little while to make up his mind. But he soon realized that what he had begun he must finish: that the new respect with which Zdenka treated him would be forfeit if he confined his exploits to a mere meat omelette, and did not carry the girl off in the end at all.

So at last he started off for Srdič's country house, bowling along in yet another stolen Ford with a rope-ladder under the seat. His heart was as full of hope as Natya's of despair. But the scene, with its fitful, moon-splashed sky, was all set for tragedy: for the night she had

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finally chosen for suicide was the selfsame night he had fixed on for their elopement: and as her lover drove carelessly through the darkness, Natya lay on the great walnut bed for the last time in her life, dressed in her bridal gown, feeling with the point of her stiletto for the right spot between her ribs.

The sudden ping of a pebble on her window so startled her that she actually pricked herself . . . but it was too late. There came another ping. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she rose and opened the casement. Out of the darkness below floated the incredible voice of her beloved.

Her long hair rose away from her head like a mane: the little scratch on her breast smarted. Was it so simple then: was she already dead? Had he risen from the grave to summon her to join him there? Then the end of a rope-ladder floated up into sight, and mechanically she caught it. That reassured her. One does not need a ladder to descend into the grave.

Mitar and Natya were together at last; the last barrier down, driving away through the night, their happiness at last in their own hands: Natya full of love and trust in her hero, Mitar full of satisfaction in the accomplishment of his task, and a growing uneasiness as to what should be done with the girl now he had got her: for

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that they were irrevocably committed to each other he could not deny. Of one thing only he was absolutely certain : that he was not in the least in love with Natya Srdič.

Most assuredly the story was winding to a tragic close : gone was even that little thread of Sheffield steel by which it had so nearly been avoided.

Mitar drove straight to the house of a married sister of his, who lived some forty miles from Dobruca : and just had time to dump Natya at the door and drive like Hell back to his quarters, if he was to be in before it was light. But he knew very well that could be only a temporary expedient.

6

When Natya's flight was discovered, Dr. Srdič was annoyed almost beyond words. It was not merely the loss of his newly wed wife, for her beauty hardly compensated for her uncompromising temper. It was the social consequences which so exercised him.

Dr. Srdič, as I have shown, was a man of humane and advanced views, caught in the toils of a conservative etiquette, against which he had not the courage to revolt. Now immemorial etiquette dictated that in a case like this the injured husband should telegraph for his wife's

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nearest male relations; and on their arrival should avenge the insult that had been offered him by shooting them dead. Etiquette was equally firm that the unhappy father and brother should accept the invitation, as if they were ignorant of its import: and allow themselves to be shot with expressions of polite, if fictitious, surprise. Then, and not till then, the ball was open, and that mortal catch-as-catch-can called a blood-feud would begin between the two families until one or other was exterminated.

Now, it may well be imagined that an enlightened and peaceable banker like Dr. Srdič was much embarrassed at the demands made of him by this social code: little as he wished to shoot old Perunič and his sons, he had even less desire to expose himself to the subsequent bullets of their relations—especially since the loss of his four younger brothers, whose usefulness he now for the first time recognized. He spent several sleepless nights trying to think of a way out: but there was no way out: etiquette was inexorable. With a heavy heart, therefore, he sent the wire: and then sat down to clean an old rusty rifle that he had not handled since he was a boy.

If Dr. Srdič was reluctant to send the wire, it was nothing to the despondency of the Perunič family on its receipt. If Dr. Srdič had debated

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for three nights before sending it, they debated for six before replying.

But it is a sign of true breeding to know when to waive etiquette: and where the banker had failed, they succeeded. They found a way by which honour would be satisfied: and instead of accepting the invitation for himself and his sons, old Perunič sent his wife and daughters-in-law.

At this no one was more overjoyed than Srdič himself: for he was under no obligation to shoot the women: instead, they were able to sit down quietly together and hold a family parliament.

It was Natya's mother who put two and two together, and confessed the story of Natya's clandestine visitor, and finally drew the thread through the irascible American officer (of whose miraculous escape they had just heard) to her ultimate disappearance.

It was now Srdič's plain duty to set off for Dobruca and shoot Mitar in the street.

But so far had he wandered from the paths of the strict morality of his fathers, that he was singularly loath even to do this. Degenerate times, indeed, when a husband could so shirk his responsibilities! The position, he explained, was extremely difficult. He had, what they of course had not, some knowledge of international affairs, and he assured the eager women that if

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he were to shoot, under whatever provocation, an American officer, and more especially an officer engaged in the charitable relief of their country, there would be, diplomatically speaking, the devil to pay. The Americans, he explained, are a people with a very weak moral sense, and, so far from recognizing the justice of his action, would be certain not only to hang him, but to visit their wrath on the entire country-side. Even if he himself escaped, the catholic outpouring of their wrath would only be all the fiercer: the whole nation would be made to suffer for it, if he allowed himself the luxury of following the dictates of his conscience.

Difficult as the women found it to realize that a Great People could be so unenlightened, so lost to all sense of moral fitness, they had to admit that in questions of the outside world they knew very much less than Pedar. They had to accept his judgment.

Then there was only one thing to be done. They must call in the bishop. He, the Bishop of Vojvdo, Srdič's cousin, who had officiated at the ceremony: it was for him to visit the American (for they were unaware how slender were Mitar's claims to that title) and to reason with him. It only shows how far gone they were in laxity, how quickly and harmfully the smallest breach of etiquette widens, that they

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should be so easily driven to have recourse to Reason.

All this time, of course, Mitar went about in a state of double uneasiness. He was extremely worried as to what was to be done with Natya: and he was not at all sure that he might not be shot at any hour of the day or night.

Then came the news that the bishop wished to see him, and, in some trepidation, he went. At first it seemed incredible that the enemy should have been reduced to so mild a form of retaliation as mere talk: but that this was the case the old man made clear.

"My son," he began, "you are in danger of Hell; you are living in adultery with another man's wife."

Mitar, with an air of great innocence, asked: "Whose?"

"With Natya, the wife of Dr. Pedar Srdič."

Mitar's countenance expressed relief: it was untrue, he explained: Mme. Srdič was staying in the mountains with a married sister of his, and he had not himself been near the place.

The bishop had to admit that this was true, and that it was hardly the conduct of the usual adulterer.

"At any rate," he went on, "you are conniving at keeping a married woman forcibly from her husband."

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"I am not," said Mitar, "for, as Srdič himself will tell you, she won't go within ten miles of him."

The old man was not used to being answered back. He decided to clinch the matter.

"Well, my son, whatever you are doing, you have got to stop it."

But Mitar was by no means cowed. He explained, gently and respectfully, that he had no intention of stopping it.

The old man was overcome by amazement.

"Then, what *do* you intend to do?"

That was the one question Mitar could not easily answer. But in a flash he made up his mind:

"I intend to marry her!"

"But"—the bishop gasped—"she is married already!"

"True," said Mitar gently, "she has been married according to the rites of the Church: but according to the Constitution of January last, it is only the civil ceremony which is valid in law: and the civil ceremony had not, in this case, yet taken place. *I* shall depart with her to Belgrade, and marry her in a registry office!"

The bishop shook with rage.

"But do you imagine that such a crime would be tolerated? Do you think, when the law was framed, it was ever thought such a situation

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would arise?—It was simply to ensure the proper registration of marriages, impossible otherwise in a State where there are so many religions—— Why, it is an insult to Mother Church, a downright insult, sir!"

Mitar leant back, and his expression was certainly insulting.

"Yes," he said, "I am afraid it will be a little awkward for Mother Church. What will she do about it?"

"You would be excommunicated . . . but the crime cannot be allowed to be committed!"

"I am not much worried by the prospect of excommunication, and I certainly intend to carry out my proposition as soon as I can get three days' leave. I repeat, what will Mother Church do about it?"

And then, before the bishop could reply, Mitar leant forward and continued:

"There is only *one* thing she can do, if the so-called insult is to be avoided: you must annul the former marriage! Find out that you made a mistake, that Natya was never properly married to Srdič at all! Then she and I can be married by Church and State both: and no insult, no awkward precedent, will have occurred."

Without a word the bishop rose and left the room. For nine sleepless nights he tried to dis-

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cover a way out . . . degenerate days, indeed, when morality, etiquette, even the Church, could be openly defied!

He found none. The only thing that he found was a flaw in the ceremony that he had himself conducted. He had to break it to Srdič that he and Natya had never been properly married at all.

At which the good banker heaved a sigh of relief: for now he was free of the whole affair —unless the pig-headed old Perunič should take it into his head to shoot him for living with his daughter when they were not properly married!

On the whole, it seemed best to avoid all complications by returning at once to Zagreb.

And so the last obstacle was down, and the romantic story of Natya and Mitar, which already had begun to circulate through the market-places in the mouths of ballad-singers and story-tellers, ended at the altar, to which Natya was led for the second time in a month. Compared with it, the stories of Paris and Helen or of Hero and Leander paled: it was told and sung with such a wealth of detail, such fervour, such gallantry, such romance, such bravery, such exaltation of the divine spirit of love, as never were heard in any story before: in short, it was told exactly as Natya herself believed it all to

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have happened: and as I should have believed it to have happened, if the story had been told me by Natya herself or even by some outsider—by anyone except Mitar Lochinvárovič himself, in the little Trieste wine-shop, when he was too drunk to remember to be discreet.

But the tragic ending? The shattering of all poor little Natya's dreams and illusions? The perpetual exasperation of Mitar, forced to pretend love in the glare of publicity to a woman for whom he did not care two pins? The horror of an innocent girl, when she discovered what manner of man he was?

I have said that the ways of love are inscrutable: that no man can prophesy them. Mitar, whose heart had remained hard when he had every reason to love Natya, was no sooner married to her, no sooner had every reason to hate and loathe her, than he saw her (as he put it) with clear eyes for the first time—in other words, fell as madly in love with her as she had with him. I cannot explain it, I can only state it. They had three children, to whom Mitar proved a devoted father: when he was forced for financial reasons to leave home, he carried the photograph taken of her on that memorable occasion in Zdenka's studio everywhere he went: and all the time he and I were together, he never failed to write to her at least once a day—this,

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after they had been married for over five years.

It only shows how important it is, once one has set one's hand to the plough, never to look back on any excuse whatever.

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THE STRANGER

I

THE street in Cylfant was so steep that if you took a middling jump from the top of the village you would not touch ground again till you reached the bottom: but you would probably hurt yourself. The houses sat each on other's left shoulder, all the way up, so that the smoke from Mrs. Grocery-Jones' chimney blew in at Mrs. Boot-Jones' basement, and out through her top windows into the cellar of the Post Office, and out through the Post Office Daughter's little bedroom casement into that of the Butchery Aunt (who was paralysed and lived downstairs): and so on, up the whole line like a flue, till it left soot on the stomachs of the sheep grazing on the hill-side above.

But that does not explain why the stranger came to Cylfant village, unless it was through curiosity: nor, indeed, what he was doing in such a Sabbath-keeping little anabaptist hamlet at all, where he might have known he would meet with an accident: nor what he was doing so far from home.

Mr. Williams was the rector of Cylfant, and perhaps thirty miles round: such an old fat man that he had difficulty in walking between his different churches on Sundays. His face

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was heavy, his eyes small but with a dream in them, and he kept sticky sweet things ready in his pocket. He was stone-deaf, so that now he roared like a bull, now whispered like a young lover. He might be heard roaring across a valley. He had one black suit, with patches on it; and one surplice, that he darned sometimes. He lived by letting the rectory in the summer: and when the Disestablishment Bill wiped away his stipend of eight pounds, he made up for it by taking in washing: you would see him in front of the rectory, legs set well apart, both heavy arms plunged up to the elbows in suds, a towel pinned to each shoulder to save his black coat, roaring a greeting to all who might pass.

Cylfant was very proud of the smallness of his congregation: for in Wales to have many church-people in a village is a great disgrace. They are always the scallywags, the folk who have been expelled from their chapels; and who hope, even if they cannot expect heaven, that things will not be quite so uncomfortable for them in the next world as if they gave up religion altogether. There were only three families, except for the Squire's governess, that ever came to Cylfant church. Mr. Williams hated verse, but he preached them pure poetry: he had such an imagination that if he meditated on the

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anatomy of angels there seemed to be strange flying things about his head; and the passionate roaring and whispering of his voice could hang Christ even on the polished brass altar-cross.

Presently he married the girl who played the harmonium: but she had one leg.

It was she, Minnie, that took in the Stranger. They were sitting one night in the rectory parlour, and Mr. Williams was reading a book of sermons with great fixity of mind, in order to forget his Loss: for that day the little ring on his watch-chain had opened, and he had lost the gold cross that he had always carried. Minnie was sure that it had been there when they started to climb the village: but they had no lantern: the wind was a fleet howling darkness, so they could not search till the morning, even if it lay on their very doorstep. Mr. Williams read three sermons at a gulp, and closed the book. It was always a thing of amazement that a man who read such dull sermons with such avidity could put so much thrill and beauty, so little of the moralities, into his own preaching.

He shut the book, and, giving a great sigh, puffed out his cheeks, while he squinted along the broad shirt-front under his chin. Minnie went to turn down the lamp—as she always did,

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for reasons of thrift, when her husband was not actually reading; and all at once she heard a cry in the night, sharp as a child's, and full of terror and innocence. She opened the door, and saw a small huddled figure in the roadway. There was a little light shining from it, bluish and fitful: and she knew at once it was something more than natural. She set her wooden leg firmly against the doorstep, and, bending down, caught the Stranger up in her arms, and lifted him over the threshold. He lay there, blinking in the lamplight: a grotesque thing, with misshapen ears and a broad, flat nose. His limbs were knotted, but the skin at his joints was yellow and delicate as a snake's belly. He had crumpled wings, as fine as petrol upon water: even thus battered, their beauty could not but be seen. He seemed in pain: and there was a small cross-shaped weal burnt on his side, as if he had stumbled on a little red-hot iron.

"Poor little thing," said Mr. Williams, looking at it sideways from his chair. "What is it?"

"It is more ugly than anything I have ever seen," said Minnie. "Perhaps it is an angel: for it was never born of woman."

"We should be more humble, Minnie," said her husband. "Who are we that God should send His angels to try us?"

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"At any rate, I think it is not," said Minnie. "We will see."

She took up the book of sermons, and touched him on the forehead with it. He gave a shrill yell of pain.

"God forgive me for my cruelty," she exclaimed. "It must be a——"

"It is a Stranger," said Mr. Williams quickly.

Minnie turned and looked at him.

"What shall we do?" she shouted in his ear. "For if we harbour it we shall surely be damned. We must not help God's enemies."

"We are taught to love our enemies," whispered Mr. Williams. "And who is God's enemy is ours too."

"But it can feel no gratitude," said Minnie. "It will return us evil for good."

"If we do good in the hope of gratitude we have our reward," roared Mr. Williams.

"You mean you will keep him?" said Minnie.

"I mean"—the old man groaned—"I do not know what to do, indeed, whatever."

But the visitor settled that question for them himself. He crawled over to the fireplace, and sitting himself on one of the reddest coals, smiled out at them with a grin that stretched from ear to ear.

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2

That was how the little devil came to Cylfant rectory. He had great natural charm, and when the cross-shaped weal on his side was better—for it healed quickly under the action of fire—his spirits returned to him. One was led to forget the grotesque beauty of his form by the generous amiability of his expression. He took to the old rector at once; and Mr. Williams himself could not but feel a secret liking for him. That night he followed them up to bed: Mr. Williams had to shut and lock the bedroom door on him. But hardly were they inside when they saw a bluish light on the panel: and presently the little devil was sitting perched upon the bed-rail, watching with a sober interest Minnie unstrap her wooden leg: and even when she said her prayers—which she did in a shamefast fashion, for fear of giving him pain—he showed no embarrassment whatever. When they were both fast asleep, he took down Minnie's old peg from the shelf where she had laid it, and did something to it in the corner. He then lay down in a pool of moonlight, and was still sleeping soundly when the rector heaved himself out of bed in the morning. The old man woke Minnie, who scrambled out of bed, and began to strap on her leg preparatory to

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getting the breakfast: but a wonderful thing happened, for no sooner had she fitted her scarred stump into the leather socket than the leather changed to flesh, and the wood to flesh, and there she was with the most elegant and seductive leg that ever troubled a man's eye: and, moreover, there was a silk stocking on it, and a high-heeled Paris shoe on it, before she could recover from her surprise. As she drew on her old ringed black-and-white cotton oddment over the other stocky red ankle she thought that never had such a pair of legs been seen together on one body. She looked round in a guilty fashion: but her husband was balanced in front of the looking-glass shaving himself. He had not seen. She pulled on her dress all in a hurry and danced away downstairs. She let up the blinds and swept the floor; and all the time her new leg behaved as well as if she had known it all her life: but directly she flung open the front door to shake the mat, it began all at once to drag, and jib: she got pins and needles in it: it jumped and kicked like a thing quite out of control. And she saw the reason: for there in the roadway, where she had found the Stranger the night before, was the rector's gold cross.

"There is no mistaking," said Minnie to herself, "where *that* leg came from."

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And, indeed, there was not. She sidled up to the cross with difficulty, and recovered it: and all at once heard steps on the cobbles. It was Scraggy Evan, the postman. Minnie's first thought was to hide the leg, for it would take some explaining away. But it would not be hidden: the shameless thing thrust the delicate turn of its ankle right under Scraggy Evan's nose. Scraggy's cheery "bore da!" was lost in a gasp, and poor Minnie fled into the house scarlet with shame, the damnable leg giving coquettish little kicks into the air as she went.

What Scraggy told the village we can only guess: but he must have told them something, or why should Mrs. Williams have received so many callers that morning? The first came when breakfast was hardly over: and the Stranger was sitting quietly on the hob picking his teeth with his tail. Minnie had great presence of mind. She ran to her work-box, and taking from it a red-flannel petticoat that she had been mending, wrapped the Stranger in it and crammed him quickly into a wooden box, begging him in a staccato whisper to lie still. Upon the face of Mr. Williams there was a look of much courage and resignation. Devil or no, he was prepared to justify his guest to all comers. Minnie opened the door, and Mrs. Grocery-Jones stood there.

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"Good morning," said she. "I was calling to ask if you are driving over to Ynysllanbedr-bachdeudraethgerylan to-day."

She paused and sniffed; then sniffed again. There was no doubt of it: somewhere sulphur was burning.

"We are not," said Minnie. "We are too busy here, indeed, with the plaguey wasps. Mr. Williams has hardly smoked out one nest, but bad are they as they were before, indeed."

Mrs. Jones gave a gasp of surprise.

"Wasps in the winter-time?" she said.

"I did not say *wasps*," said Minnie, "I said the *wall-paper*, which the doctor thinks may have the scarlet-fever lurking in it, so have we fumigated the whole house."

It was lucky, thought Minnie, that her husband was so deaf. He would never have forgiven her.

"Well, good gracious!" said Mrs. Jones. As her eyes got used to the dim light she caught sight of a broad head with two beady yellow eyes, peering at her from a soap-box. "And is that a cat you have there, Mrs. *Williams*?"

"It is a *pig*!" she cried with sudden heat; for her new leg showed an obvious desire to kick Mrs. Jones out of the house. "It has

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the wind," she explained, " so we thought it would be best in the house, indeed."

" Well, good gracious me ! " repeated Mrs. Jones.

Minnie's leg was quivering, but she managed to control it. Mrs. Jones was staring past her at the pig, as if she could not take her eyes off it. As, indeed, she could not : for suddenly she shot half across the road, backwards, with the force of a bullet : and when released she scrambled down the street, as she herself explained it, " as if the devil was after me " : and there was the Stranger, wrapped still in the red-flannel petticoat, sitting on the window-sill and grinning amiably at her back.

3

If Mr. Williams had lived longer, a few curious things might have happened in Cylfant village : but he did not. There was a buzzing feeling in his head all that day, and when he went to bed at night he lay quietly on his back staring at the ceiling. It had turned a bright green. Presently, with his eyes open still, he began to snore. Minnie did not notice anything queer ; and in the small hours of the morning, after two or three loud snorts, he stopped altogether.

When he felt better, he found that his soul

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was outside his body. It was not at all the kind of thing he had expected it to be, but was fairly round, and made of some stuff like white of egg. He gathered it gently into his arms, and began to float about: his body had disappeared. Presently he was aware that the Stranger was still watching him.

"You'll be damned for this: double-damned even, for giving place to the devil—and you a priest." He sighed. "It is so hard," he went on seriously, "even for devils to conquer their better nature. Oh, I *try* hard enough. I surely try. The seeds of goodness have lurked in us ever since the Fall: try as we will, they *sprout*.

"'With a fork drive Nature out,
She will ever yet return.'

"Temptation is always lurking ready for us: it is a long and a hard fight: the Forces of Evil against the Forces of Good. But we shall conquer in the end: with Wrong on our side, we *must* conquer." There was an elation in his face that transcended all earthly ugliness. "At last," he went on, "I have done a really immoral act: an act with no trace of good in it, either in motive or effect. You will be damned, and Minnie will be damned too, even if she has to hop to hell on the leg I gave her. But it was hard, hard."

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Old Williams floated over on to the other side.

"I am a sinful man," he said; "a very sinful man. Heaven was never my deserts, whatever."

The devil looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, you were not!" he said earnestly. "Indeed, you were not! You were the truest——"

He stopped suddenly. Williams was aware of the presence of some very unpleasant personality. He looked round: and behind him stood a tall figure with thin, tight lips and watery eyes, who began speaking at once—rapidly, as if by rote.

"As a matter of form," said he, "I claim this soul."

"As a matter of form," replied the devil in a sing-song voice, "he is mine."

The angel rapped out: "De qua causa?"

"De diabolo consortando," chaunted the little devil, in even worse Latin.

"Quæ sit evidentia?"

"Tuos voco oculos ipsos."

"Quod vidi, vero, atque affirmo.—Satis," continued the angel. "Tuumst." And he turned to go.

"Stop!" cried the Stranger suddenly, all his bad resolutions breaking down.

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"Stop!" he cried, and began speaking rapidly. "I'm a backslider, I know, but the strain is too much: there's no true devilry in me. Take him: take him: there never was better Christian in Wales, I swear it: and to that alone his damnation is due: pure charity——"

"What are you talking about?" snapped the angel petulantly. "The case is settled: I have withdrawn my claim."

"So do I!" cried the devil excitedly. "I withdraw mine."

The angel shrugged his wings.

"What's the use of making a scene?" he said. "Never, in all my office, have I known a fiend break down and forget himself like this before. You are making an exhibition of yourself, sir! Besides, if we both withdraw, he can't go anywhere. It's none of my business."

He shrugged his wings and soared away.

"*Heaven or Hell or the Land of Whipperginny*," murmured Williams to himself, vague memories of Nashe rising to the surface of his astonishment. Together they watched the angel's purple pinions bearing him from sight: the Stranger cocked a snook at his straight back.

"Where now?" asked the rector.

"Where now? Heaven! Wait till he's out of sight."

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He turned and winked broadly at Williams, making a motion on his bare shanks as if to thrust his hand in a pocket.

"You come with me," he said. "I know how I can get things fixed for you!"

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LOCOMOTIVE

PERHAPS the signals were to blame. Certainly not Abel: for there never was a more conscientious engine-driver born: a very proper Union man: bred of sound locomotive stock, and steady with his wages: a man, moreover, in spite of his passion for bright shining brass, with a Soul; and an Ambition that always flickered ahead of him between the plates like a demure person, keeping his two eyes glued to the little glass window in front of his cabin. So it certainly could not have been Abel's fault. Not even when his Soul beckoned ever so alluringly in front of him down the permanent way did he let his train draw a few bare seconds ahead of time. It must have been the signals that were to blame.

When the crash came, Abel was flung violently from his feet: he had just time to see his Ambition give a terrified, desperate leap into the darkness: and the Night Express at his back, with the clatter and din of half Domesday, vaulted into the air like a buck-rabbit in spring.

Abel did not feel much hurt, whoever else was; and his senses returned to him almost at once. Indeed, he did not feel hurt at all. It surprised him that his engine seemed still

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upright on its eight round wheels. But its behaviour was odd: for it was leaping into the air like a young thing; till Abel had to heave hold of all the knobs and gadgets within reach to keep his balance, nor could he for the life of him stretch out to let off steam. The bats and the owls and the plovers were weaving such a net of swoopings round him that Abel's head seemed spinning on his shoulders. Still the engine rollicked ecstatically on its bogies: and then of a sudden it darted straight across the field, taking one of Horlick's gigantic hoarding-cows in its full stride and bearing it clean away: then crashed through a young spinney, waking the thick scents of crushed spring bank at its back, and out on to the road. There it straddled monstrously, from ditch to ditch, dribbling hot cinders on to the tarred macadam.

Behind him, through the spinney, by the permanent way, Abel could see fire and smoke: and screams were rising faint and far off: and as if from a derailed engine steam was gushing out with a great wail. Far away down the road the two head-lights of a car were widening fast: and presently Abel saw the driver straining his eyes towards the accident—straining so fixedly that he seemed unaware of the locomotive blocking the roadway: so Abel blew three shrieking blasts on the whistle; for the pace

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of the car was terrible. But the driver seemed not to hear: kept straight on: nearer rushed and suddenly nearer, till his head-lights blinded full in Abel's eyes . . . yet there was no expected crash; only a rush of air, with dust rising; and Abel saw the tail-light dwindling on the other side. Presently the motorist drew up, and ran across the field to the wreckage. A little cloud of dust, as if it were ghostly dust, seemed still rising through the foot-plates of Abel's cabin, which was rocking slightly. The smell of oil grew fainter in his nose.

But dawn was already creeping among the hen-roosts: and with the first cock-crow the great engine glided forward, seeming to tread delicately as a bird: for whereas before it had cut pungent ruin through the spinney, now it hardly spread a wake through the hay at its back, nor woke the ants in their hills, nor harassed the spider at his morning loom. The west wind blew through the glass into Abel's face; so thin that it never stirred his hair; and the furnace glowered faintly through the field-mists. The fires burnt still untended: for John Stoker was gone—when and how, Abel might not remember. He took up the shovel and flung coal into them himself. At the same time it seemed to gather speed: but advanced

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steady now, as if on a main line: growing faster, till tree and coppice were whipping past, farms scattering to rearward. All obstacles melted as if before ghosts: and it was an odd thing, but whenever Abel looked there was a faint streaky glimmer, the glimmer of light on the rails of a permanent way, that seemed to form a few sleeper-spans ahead of him, cutting through trees, houses, hills, and dying out behind as these ordinary things closed up again like a wall after him.

Soon he was climbing more slowly up the incline of a wooded hill: and presently a gipsy fire twinkled ahead, some five sleepers round it. The wonder of the thing had ceased to appal him: he never thought of need to give them warning, when the whole world seemed grown unsubstantial. Four of them slept on safe: but one sat up suddenly with a slurring cry, his face drawn with nightmare, his arms thrust out stiffly till the clanking bogey-wheels caught them and beat them down under, without a jolt . . . and the rest never stirred in their sleep; for the engine scarcely brushed their faces: and it was then second cock-crow, with a faint greenness in the air.

Again, after second cock-crow, there was a child who woke and waved her hand to him as he passed: awkwardly, for, standing on the

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window-sill, she could hardly reach her arm through the top of the sash.

Then there were women who woke and cried out names to him, as if they saw husband or brother or child riding in a train behind him: but Abel knew that he and his engine were alone. What was it they saw? The shadowy carriages of Annwn? Souls pilgriming to Hades? The fiery chariots of Heaven? I do not say: but perhaps each differently: and some, nothing.

There were three men sitting on the hard stone of a field-roller, one night in the small hours, by the roadside at the top of Headington Hill. Tubal Kayne had a dancing-shoe in each side-pocket, and Surrud had his bagpipes: and the dewy hair of all of them hung forward over their eyes. Seth was laying glow-worms on the flat white front of his shirt, and Surrud was carefully cleaning the reeds in the drone of his pipes. There was a single chaffinch challenging in the hedgerow when it should not. Tubal Kayne tumbled asleep in the long grass, and they all wanted to go home, but were not able.

Surrud put each reed in place with a sigh, and rose to his feet unsteadily: set elbow to bag, and fingers to chanter, and foot to the road, playing up and down in front of them: ten

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yards each way, then back again, strutting carefully with legs apart, till the unending rigmarole of his piping brought Kayne to sitting up on his haunches. From Oxford Seth heard an engine whistling thinly: and presently the clanking of its pistons beat heavily even through the piping: though there is no railroad within many miles.

Surrud turned and piped back again; the slow rhythm of a train drew nearer. He thought it was a goods train. Surrud stopped piping suddenly, so that the air filtered dolefully through the drones.

"A train!" he cried. "Seth! Kayne! Let's board her!"

"There are no trains pass here," said Seth.

"Why not?" said Surrud.

"It is an echo," said Seth, listening.

"What are you talking about?" said Tubal Kayne.

Suddenly Abel's great engine swung by them in the dark, a shadowy string of trucks at its tail.

Seth saw Surrud carefully wait his chance, then fling himself, pipes and all, on one of them.

Kayne did not see this: he saw Seth presently balance himself: then spring suddenly up, grasping at nothing at all; fall through on

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his face in the road's middle. Moreover, he saw that Surrud had vanished.

But Seth, his chin grazed in the road's dust, heard Surrud's terrible piping dwindling fast towards Beckley: then came third cock-crow, and the night was silent.

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LLWYD

THE mountains seemed knotted, and climbing on one another's backs; stretching their rocky fingers up to Heaven, who sat mockingly like a vast Boy Blue astride the roof-ridge of the world. Their backs were rugged, lumpy, with rough patches of bilberry; their heads were grey, hairy with distant chutes of shale; but their black, gnarled fingers clutched among the white, unsubstantial clouds, straining up, without movement. And the clouds sailed quietly over like silent argosies, ballasted with thunder, sounding the plain with a long shadow, or anchored with a silver chain of rain; then the thin breeze would fill their mainsail and foretopsail, and they would slide quietly on, breasting the crested hills.

There were not many people lived so high as the clouds: a few scattered farms, where nothing grew; where every one was born old; where children, monstrous through inbreeding, gaped with vague eyes and mouths at travellers; a land of Struldbrugs. On the Craig Ddrwg, said Legend, lived once an old Lady Saint; and now she haunts it; if you do not throw a stone on her grave as you pass she leaps upon you, as ugly as Sin.

Llwyd was born in the Cwm-y-Moch, in a

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small grey house with thick walls, and grew with a clouded brain. Every Sunday his father and mother became very grim and fierce, and tramped ten miles to hear the thunderings of their God. But Llwyd used to creep out into the farmyard and build queer things out of mud, or creep away into the hills and listen for the Ellyllon. Sometimes he heard them; one night he woke up in tingling terror while the Trumpet of Annwn played thinly across the valley. But he never told his parents about the Ellyllon or the Trumpet. The chapels do not hold with fairies. But the old women whisper tales secretly to the children, and the children tiptoe away and whisper more secrets among themselves: so the legends go on.

Llwyd did not go to school because he was too mazed. He could not understand the simplest things, even the Bible. But he loved to finger smooth, round objects, such as china nest-eggs, and to hear the harmonium. Brass he did not like, partly because it shone, partly because it was not pleasant to touch. He scowled whenever there was brass in the room. One day, when he could bear the bright shining warming-pans and the bright copper candlesticks and the brass candlesticks and the copper jam-boilers no more, he crept quietly up the

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hill to a little three-cornered cave where sheep sheltered, and began to talk.

"Maned," he whispered, "Maned," once or twice. Maned was the first fairy who had grown into his brain. She slid quietly across the clear, diamond-like regions of his mind where the clouds had not yet rolled; she had no form, but was nevertheless very dear to him. So was Mogon. Mogon, too, had no form, but in nature he was part man, part shaggy, kindly dog. Of Derwyl he was half afraid; she was cold and fair, and in his queer, crazed way he always thought of her as something to do with smooth stones. She never came, like Maned or Mogon, to his call.

But now Maned slid into his mind, and he lay very happily close to the turf, talking to her in his head. When she was there and Mogon, he had never any fear of the wicked old Saint of Craig Ddrwg and her ghastly Sucking Stone. When in the night a storm of ghosts pattered their fingers against the window-pane, Llwyd would call silently for Mogon, and Mogon would cross the moonlight with unheard barking; and then the fire would burn bright again; but when he was very calm and still Derwyl would slide suddenly across his dreams like a cool fish.

But this day he went and lay in the three-

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cornered cave, and Maned became suddenly real to him; he began to ask her many clouded questions in his mind, questions that most small children ask and their nurses answer for them, incomprehensibly, before they are five years old; and before many more years they give up asking them; all the big questions beginning with "Why . . ." But Llwyd had never asked a question aloud in his life.

When he said "Why . . ." to Maned she would tell him inarticulately all the secrets of the world, so that he felt very wise; wiser even than the small green elephant that the Poet saw following the feet of magicians about their attics. Then he would try and frame this too-great wisdom in a thought; but his poor brain always failed him when he tried to think, and he would go sorrowfully back to his mud-patting in the farmyard. But to-day he tried to fit the crooked key of Maned's answerings into the rusty lock of his own brain; but, try as he would, it could never go through the narrow keyhole.

Far below him in the valley, under the black crag of Craig Ddrwg, a small silver stream like spilt mercury glittered on the rocks; far above two wheeling buzzards darted jealously across each other's hunting-ground. Llwyd wanted to know its meaning, and why it made him some-

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times glad and sometimes melancholy. He jumped suddenly to his feet, hammering, as it were, with both hands on the doors of Knowledge, yelling for admittance, till the ecstatic snub-nosed lambs stopped and stared at this new surprise.

Then, cowed, Llwyd turned and walked back to the farm aimlessly, on indeterminate legs. There was nothing on his idiot face to show what had been happening.

In a sort of wild resentment he caught a shrieking chicken in the yard; then vague memories of beatings made him look round in lunatic fear and let it go. He hid behind the bracken-sledge while one of his brothers passed, and kept his hand over his face. David had never hit him; but he was afraid.

As he slipped into the house, he met his father, and caught at his coat in a sudden resolve, and tried to question him.

His father shook him roughly.

"Ellyllon!" cried old Evan. "Who was telling you lies about them, indeed?"

For, as I said, the chapels do not hold with fairies.

Then and there Evan took and ran his son into the parlour, where the sun filtered through red and yellow stained-glass on to the springless sofa and the Tudor dresser, with its willow-

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pattern plates, and on to the hated brass; while Evan opened a Bible and preached the fiercest and most eloquent sermon he had ever preached in his life. His voice, like that of most Welsh preachers, soon rose to a sing-song sibilant wail; cold fear rippled over Llwyd in waves; little bits of what his father was saying contrived to trickle through the defence of his idiocy. Terrors of Hell took hold of him, burst on him in a sudden huge wave of semi-understanding. He caught hold of the table and screamed till his father stopped. Evan took breath, and went on again with a wonderful eloquence, half chanting, half shouting, telling him this and that. Llwyd became dully silent and listened: relentlessly his father mapped out the universe, and God, and Hell, and the Why and the Wherefore, and idols, and punishment, and Amalekites, and the Beast, and the angels out of Ezekiel, till Llwyd saw a vast mountain-girt plain, where *all* these things advanced upon him like a patchwork army, clear and sharp, while Jehovah chanted a strange pæan from the belly of the Beast; then black thunder-clouds from Sinai rolled down over his mind, and the three fairies, fleeing before them, vanished into the vague murk of Ezekiel; the black thunder-clouds rolled roaring down into the plain, and the clear diamond-like spaces in his mind were clouded

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and blotted out for ever. Jehovah's pæan faded to a whine, and Llwyd crept out to sit in the muddy farmyard.

The three fairies were lost for ever in the fiery murk of Ezekiel, and the black thunder-clouds from Sinai grew solid as rock, crushing in with their weight the three-cornered cave in the hills, blocking him in from his imaginations with their eternal adamant.

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POOR MAN'S INN

SCATTERED up and down the main English roads there are certain caves, barns, empty cottages, and other places of shelter that all tramps know of. You will tell them, probably, by seeing a few lousy rags hanging on bushes near: but they are surprisingly well hidden, as a rule. Once inside: more inadequate bits of rag: and tins for cooking, and the remains of the last fire: a shapeless candle-end on a bit of slate, a crust or two, perhaps: and a smell of mice.

One night in a rough spring that I was wet through to the tail of my shirt, walking in the Forest of Clun on the Welsh Marches, I left the road by a narrow gate on the right and turned into a quarry. Clun is one of the oldest oak-forests in Britain: very steep, wild country: not very far from Ludlow, a curious town crowded on a hill-top round the red castle where Comus was first acted. This quarry was of the same red stone. Once off the road, it bends to the left: you are at the bottom of a sort of shaft, roofed very far up with dripping oak-leaves: and on one side the rock caves in, leaving room for a dozen men or more to shelter on a ledge of sandstone. I felt my way in with both hands, for the night was black enough

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outside. The wind in the trees above roared: and every few moments as they swayed the branches unburdened themselves of rain like a wave breaking. Then the wind lulled, and from the sheltered ledge I heard a snoring, almost as loud as of a man in a fit. Then there were steps behind me: the clank of iron on stone.

I crept my way into shelter: a voice behind me: "*Whisht, who's there?—All right, Friend.*" A burly figure followed me in: I could hear an iron foot clink on the stone, and answered his greeting. He fumbled for a match, and struck it; but the wind blew it out. I had a glimpse of a huge body, one of the broadest men I have ever seen, queerly dressed. Behind me the other lodger snored stertorously: the newcomer felt his way past me, breathing heavily and clicking his tongue in a hollow tooth. Paper rustled.

"Silly blighter! He's drunk as a lord. Rolled himself in newspaper too, to keep the cold out. Guess it will serve our turn, Friend."

He stripped off the drunkard's covering (who never stirred): and must miraculously have found some dry wood in a recess of the cave, for I could hear him moving heavily about, still clicking his tongue in his tooth: and then he shielded the flame of another match in his

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cap, and lit a fire. Its little flames flickered desperately at first: then suddenly it blazed up, lighting the cave like a furnace-mouth, where the three of us were set like the Three Children. The flames made rubies of the nearer rain: the smoke sucked a little, battered down by the cold air outside, and wandered off towards the other end of the ledge.

The fire-lighter crouched over his fire. He was an immense man: not tall, but with long arms, a mountainous chest, and a broad, flat face like a savage, though it was more cheerful in expression. He had a knotted kerchief round his neck, and wore a sleeveless coat of lion-skin: bare arms, with raindrops still glistening on the tattoo-marks: baggy sailor's trousers, that half hid his iron foot, held up by a leather belt decorated with strips of tiger and python-skin. By the fire he had set down a heavy bag, that clinked with metal: rain-water was running out of its bottom. He blew out his cheeks, and warmed his hands, thrusting them right into the smoke.

"Whew, it's a cruel night for sleeping rough! God knows why I ever took to it. I've got a tough little circus of my own laid up in London, waiting for the money to start it: and here I am walking the road like any poor blooming lug-biter. How long have you been on the

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road, Friend?—Look at him, now: a nice, sociable, matey sort of chap to spend a night with, ain't he?"

He picked up a small piece of rock and heaved it on to the sleeping man's stomach: who hiccoughed suddenly and then went on snoring.

"Wake up, you silly blighter! Can't you see there's two gentlemen wanting to have a chat with you? Wake up! The Copper's after you! It's Closing Time! Wake up!—Coo, I can't understand a chap like that, what drinks himself silly. Let's have a look at him."

He heaved over on to one hand, and held a burning branch over the sleeper's face.

"I know him too: chap called Lenora: I done him down last Worcester Races. Won five pounds, he did; oh, he was roaring drunk that day. I fetched an old monkey's skull what I'd got in my pack, curio-like: I wired it on to a haddock's backbone, and told him it was a Mermaid's Anatomy. Young one. He gave me four pound for it, he did. He's been looking for me ever since, they tell me. But *I* don't care. Wake up, you skunk! Don't you remember old Bill, what sold you the Anatomy? You been lookin' for me, have you? Eh? Wake up!"

But Mr. Lenora was dead to the world. Bill chuckled.

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" Look at that, now ! Born to be hanged, he is. See them eyebrows meeting ? Born to be hanged, that means. I ain't a bit religious : but I'm very superstitious, *you* know. Not Jesusy, but I do believe in a bit of luck. See them bits of snake-skin ? Do you think they're lucky, eh ? I do. Holy, they are. Holy Snake. I got them out in Malay, same as where I learnt tattooing, and the Magic Coffin trick. But I ain't had a bit of luck, not since. Are you married ? "

" No."

" That's right, Friend ; don't you be, neither. It's a dirty duck what paddles always in the same puddle, *I* say.—I am."

" What ? "

" Married. But I'm through with it. Look at that ! "

He rummaged inside his shirt, and pulled out an old pocket-book, full of cuttings and photographs.

" See that ? That's me. Slung up in chains sixty feet above-deck, in seven pair of regulation handcuffs ! See all the passengers watching ? I got out in four minutes, same as I said I would.—That's me as a little boy : you can guess I had a good home : white collar and all.—Ah, that's the one."

He handed me a creased photograph of a

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young woman, in the conscious splendour of Sunday black, standing in front of a balustrade, one hand rested firmly on an aspidistra-pot on a fancy stand.

"Now, would you call her handsome?"

I examined it carefully. "I would."

He seemed disappointed.

"Would you? I wouldn't: not *real* handsome. Not like one of them flash girls. That's my wife! Irish girl: Irish temper too. Lumme! Lord alone knows what I wanted to do it for. We was married proper, *you* know: Registry and all.—Nor her either! She'd got birth, and she'd got education—read easy as winking, she could. She hadn't got no business to marry a chap like me! Ought to know better, she did!"

Mr. Lenora stirred, and muttered something unintelligible that was smothered in another snore. Bill turned on him, his face all comical with mock indignation.

"Now then, you low fellaa, will you kindly not interraapt!" He said this in an astonishingly good parody of an Oxford accent. "—or I'll roll you out in the ruddy rain!" he added in his own voice, and chuckled.

He clicked his tongue in his tooth once or twice, meditatively.

"But I'm through with it," he went on.

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"Coo, lumme, what a life!—Hallo, who goes there?"

There was a sound of more footsteps through the rain: a man's cautious plodding through the dark, and the clip-clap of a loose sole on the shoe of the woman who followed him.

"Walk up! Walk up!" cried Bill cheerily.

But the stranger was unresponsive. He was a small man, with that roundness of figure and thinness of limb that often come of having too little to eat. As he paused at the edge of the firelight he blew through his moustache so that the raindrops tumbled out of it. But the oddest thing about him was his nose: he had a nervous trick of twitching it, like a rabbit. He sat down with a grunt, taking not the slightest notice of the girl at his heels. She had pulled her skirt up to hood her head: her muddy petticoat flapped against her legs. She took equally little notice of him: and sat down, too, a little way off, swathed like a mummy, half in the firelight and half in the shadow.

"Full bar to-night, gentlemen!" Bill went on jocularly. "A pint of Old and Mild all round, please, Joe!—Coo, I could do with a bit of grog inside me to-night. Cruel, ain't it, Mr. Parker?"

"My name ain't Parker," said the stranger

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sullenly, his nose twitching. "It's Spencer. What do you call me Parker for?"

Bill looked at him and shook with mirth. "Coo! I don't know! I can't think! Now, why ever should I go and call him Parker, eh, Friend?"

He dug me in the ribs, and went off into fresh peals of mirth.

"Don't take no offence," he went on. "I ain't a fighting man. I ain't that sort of chap. If a man wants to quarrel with me, I don't hit him; not I!"—he began to chuckle in anticipation of his little joke—"I just go up to him, friendly like, and bite a piece right out of his bloomin' face!"

Mr. Spencer snorted.

"All right. I ain't going to have a pull out of your mug, you needn't worry!"

Suddenly he spun round with incredible swiftness, and thrust his face close up against the stranger's, pressing his own nose with his finger. It had no bone in it, and went absolutely flat like a piece of india-rubber. Mr. Spencer tumbled over in consternation.

"See now," said Bill, "that shook him!—It always shakes 'em!" he added innocently, as if it were a habit of social intercourse with him. "It shook Nell. I done it in the Regist'y Office. It shook the Registrar: he told me to

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remember it was a Solemn Occasion. Coo!"

"You'd be a nice sort of chap to be married to, you would!" said Mr. Spencer, slowly and provocatively.

"So I *was*!" said Bill impressively. "But, as I've just been telling this gentleman here, I'm Through With It. I left Nell, back at Oxford. Months ago that was. Mind you, I was a good husband to her."

"What was you doing in Oxford?" I asked.

"Exercising my profession! Getting out of seven pair of handcuffs, thirty-five feet of chain, and a straight waistcoat, in four minutes, while Nell took the hat round. I got handcuffs here" —he tapped his sack—"of all the ages. I got a pair with teeth on 'em—same as was used by the Savage Romans, and the Ancient Mammoths of the Bohemian Desert. I've studied 'em. See here!"

He put his hand to his capacious nose, and brought out of it a small instrument like a whistle. "See that? That's a master-key to all the handcuffs of Europe! Studied for that, I did: made it myself."

He put it back in his nose: where he seemed able to carry it in perfect comfort.

"As I was saying, we had a good week of it: they're a bit of All Right, them Oxford Police.—But I didn't leave her, not till she come out

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of the 'Firmary! I was always a good husband to her: careful, like. I hung on till she was right again. Nobody can't say I wasn't a good husband to her."

"What was the matter with her?" I asked.

"Well, you see, we had a bit of a row: too many girls, *you* know. She used to get wild if I brought 'em into the house. Threaten to kill me, she used to. Only her temper, *you* know: she didn't mean nothing by it: she was a good girl at heart. I just took up the poker: not to beat her, you know, just to *learn* her: and she tripped up and broke her poor blooming ankle. Month, she was, in the 'Firmary."

Mr. Spencer snorted again, and took off his boots. He ostentatiously poured the water out of them on to the fire, to see it go up in steam. Then he began to examine the condition of his feet. But Bill went on, undisturbed.

"Pretty thin time of it I had: my show was stale; oughtn't never to do it more than a week. I didn't get more than a tanner a night. Nor I couldn't change it easy. I was used to do the Magic Coffin Trick—shove Nell in a coffin, padlocked 'ead and foot each end, then saw it through the middle. That always fetched 'em; but I couldn't do it without Nell. You can't

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do it with *any* girl, you see: she's got to be made that way, like Nell was. Nor I hadn't got my Electrocuting Chair: *that* always fetched 'em, but you couldn't lug it around with you. Nor I couldn't think of any new trick. You know how it is: when you're in luck, you can think of half a dozen new stunts; but when you're down on it, you just can't think of nothing. Coo, lumme, I remember up Llandudno way, once, I got a bit of wood, and I nailed thousands of lugworms on to it, so as you couldn't see the wood for the worms. Then I put it in a tank, and exhibited it as a marine monster, Pride of the Ocean! When the silly worms waggled, you see, they swum it about! I took pounds on pounds out of that: gate-money. Stuff in the papers, there was: '*Unknown Monster Captured at Llandudno.*' The Johnnie came down from the Aquarium: *he* wanted to buy it. That put the wind up me, that did: I broke it up. Said I'd throwed it back in its native ocean, I did." Bill chuckled.

"He offered a reward, to anyone who could catch it again. They was all out fishing, for weeks they were. Coo, lumme!

"—But as I was saying, I couldn't think of nothing. I couldn't do a bit of house-breaking, cos I hadn't got no money: you must 'ave something, if you're going to win. I got the

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brains, and I got the experience: but I 'adn't got the capital. There wasn't nothing for it but fire-eating. I done it. But it's terrible hard on the kidneys, that is: I was awful bad inside. No one can't do it more than six months, even ones what's used to it. When Nell was comin' out, I 'adn't got no more than half a crown. So the day before, I shoves a bob into her bed, and I beat it."

"Did she know you was going?" I asked.

"*Now!* Made a scene, she would 'ave. She was real fond of me. I was a good husband to 'er. I don't suppose she's got over it yet, proper. Terrible fond, she was."

Mr. Spencer was puffing with anger: his nose twitching up and down as if he had the ague.

"That's a nice edifying little story to tell a party of strangers! Washin' yer dirty linen in public!"

"*Dirty linen?*" said Bill, in genuine amazement. "Why, I don't see——"

He paused: and Mr. Spencer fidgeted nervously all over.

"Yus, dirty linen! You're as bad as a divorce-court, you are! You ought to be in gaol, you did!"

The girl, sitting huddled away from the fire, was shivering with cold, her teeth chattering

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with cold. Suddenly she threw the skirt back off her head: the light shone on a face of quite delicate beauty, now marred and twisted with rage. Her great eyes glittered in her head like fire: her lips were drawn back tightly from her shining teeth. Bill stared at her stupidly: slowly his expression changed to one of delight and an extraordinary tenderness. "*Well, I'm*——" he began. Her hand was hidden in a fold of her dress . . . there was the sudden crack of a revolver, and then Bill pitched right over sideways on to his face.

Mr. Spencer turned towards her, seemed to tower over her.

"Whatever have you been and gone and done?" he said, very slowly.

Nell took no notice of him. The passion of her face had changed to a sort of impersonal hardness: she rose on to one knee, her loose, wet hair blowing against the roof of the cave. She threw the revolver down: it glanced on a stone, and skiddered down the slope to where Mr. Lenora was still sleeping—the man born to be hanged.

Mr. Spencer still stared at her fixedly.

"Crikey!" he said presently, "Crikey!" several times, with increasing emphasis. Suddenly he let out a funny little screech in the back of his throat: his eyes were starting like a

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pug-dog's. Then he said "Lumme!" Then he caught up his two boots and floundered suddenly out of the cave, crashing through the bushes to the road. I could hear him hollering with terror as he ran, till his breath gave out.

Nell spoke for the first time: she had never taken her eyes off Bill, not for a moment.

"That'll learn him," she said in a matter-of-fact tone. "He won't do *that* again!"

Then she turned towards me, the soft Irish in her voice gradually increasing.

"Stranger," she said, "this is none of your business."

"It is not," said I.

"You had better be going," said she. She did not seem to have noticed Lenora lying there with the pistol by him, but was looking at me. She was very beautiful.

I jerked my head towards the road.

"That one's gone," I said.

"He's gone, surely."

"Would you come along of me a bit?" I suggested diffidently.

"Boy, wouldn't you be frightened out of your life, to be with such as me?"

"*I*'d not be afraid!"

"Brave boy!" She spoke with a sarcasm that was shattering: which moved me to sulkiness.

"I'd—I'd not ask nothing of you."

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For a moment the strange, statuesque woman seemed to flicker into life:

"*Them as don't ask, don't get!*"

"Will you come, then, Nell?"

"Do you want me? Certain?"

I rushed on, heedless of her strange tone:

"You're a grand woman! *I* couldn't kill a man, like that, and not turn a hair!"

Her sarcasm flashed out again. She stared at me, slowly, from head to foot:

"No; I think you could not."

I looked at Lenora, still sleeping drunkenly, with the revolver at his side. He was born to be hanged, anyhow. If I could get the girl away, no one would ever suspect *her*.

"Wouldn't you be afraid," I burst out, "to be walking alone at night, with the memory of *that*?" And I touched the giant with my toe.

"Walking?" she said, and began to laugh: gently at first, and then like a cataract. "It's a *walk* shall I be!"

She bowed her head forward and shook with peal upon peal of laughter: suddenly flung her head up, and laughed till the quarry echoed with it: her hair came right down: her eyes streamed with tears, but still she laughed. My hair prickled on to its ends with horror.

"God go with you, you poor woman," I said hastily: "for *I* dare not!"

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The rain had ceased. High up among the tree-tops the moon raced through the clouds. As suddenly as she had begun, she grew calm again.

"No," she said slowly and with great emphasis; "no, *that* you daren't."

She began to plait up her hair, over her shoulder: coiled it round her head and pinned it.

Suddenly she fell forward on the ground, scratching at it with her finger-nails, crying "Bill! Bill!" in a little husky voice like a child's. It was not a sight I could bear. I sat there biting at the back of my hand; staring at the dying fire, the moon, anything. Then again she stood up, breathing calmly and deeply: patted her hair once or twice, and like a shadow slipped out of the cave. She was gone.

Bill sat up.

"Whisht, is she gone, Friend?—Coo, lumme, *that* shook her!" He chuckled happily.

I stiffened up where I still sat, cracking my head on the cave's roof.

"Aren't you hurt, man?" I stuttered.

"Hurt? Lord, no!" He chuckled. "Take it from me, Friend: give a woman a gun, and she'll miss you at six inches: but give her a knife, and she'll never go wrong, never!—But *that*'ll learn her not to go killing me!" he added

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half fiercely. "*That* ought to be a lesson to her, eh, Friend? Lord, she was pretty near mad, she was: she loved me that crool!—You thought *you*'d go off with her, did you? Coo, lumme, what a joke! You are a caution!"

He roared with laughter, slapping his huge thighs. Then he heaved over to one side and picked up the revolver.

"'Tisn't your time yet, my friend," he said soberly enough, leaning over Mr. Lenora, whose face was twitching with some discomfort as he slept:

"Though you haven't got *this* cove to thank you didn't wake up in clink to-morrow! Lumme, they'd have strung him, sure: what with his threatening me and all."

But Mr. Lenora slept on.

Bill chuckled again.

"Though I'm not saying it wouldn't be better for him if they did! It's got to come some time: you can't go against a sure sign like them eyebrows: and it would be better for his soul to be hanged when he hadn't done nothing than waiting till he had, wouldn't it, Friend?"

"You're right there, mister," I answered conciliatingly.

But he suddenly swung round with incredible rapidity, and covered me with his gun. His cheerful face was twisted with ferocity.

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"So you thought *you*'d go off with her, did you?"

"I—I—I didn't mean anything!"

"Oh, you didn't, didn't you? Going with a married woman!"

His mouth was still set like a wild beast's: but there was a gleam in his eye—and I banked on it.

"She wasn't a married woman, mister; she was a widow!"

He burst out laughing, and thrust the revolver into his side-pocket.

"Bless you, I hadn't no cause to worry! I know Nell."

"I don't know about you," said I; "but my legs are stiff as a board with wet and cold, and there's a good moon. Let's walk on a mile or two, before dawn."

"Sure," said Bill, and swung his huge sack. Together we found our way out on to the road.

"No, Friend, as I was saying," began Bill sententiously.

There was Nell, huddled at the road's side, half in the moonlight. Bill touched her. She was quite dead, stabbed through the heart. Bill's face went grey: his lip dropped.

"Lumme," he said, "I hadn't counted on that!"

In a sudden temper with him, I burst out into Welsh:

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"Yr hên llofrudd i ti!" I cried. "Yr hên . . ."

Then he dropped on his knees, caught up her staring head in his arms.

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"*That* was the end of the world," he said, and sighed. "It's all gone—finished."

"I had not noticed it," said I.

The eyes that regarded me were flecked with brown in the iris.

"No? No; perhaps some wouldn't. But there is no more Space, no Time, no Matter."

"But there is," said I. "I can see a sunset in the sky, and there is a smoky mist in the hollows."

"There is not," said he.

"And I can hear that lame mare nicker."

"You cannot," said he.

"And the bank soaks through my breeches."

"It does not," said he.

"But to-day is Friday."

"It is not," said he.

"Yet you are still biting your black finger-nails."

"I am not," said he.

"And talking to me."

"I am not," said he. "How could I be talking to you? The world is ended."

"Then what is it I am seeing? Am I like a man struck blind who carries under his lids what he last set eyes on?"

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"All your senses are clean cut off you like limbs, and you have only the illusion of them, as men do who have lost a leg or an arm."

At that I was dismayed, because I have always taken a great delight in my senses. Then a little, melancholy, wandering smell wisped down the road: partly bitter, from the scent of a horse in it and some new whitewash.

"I don't believe you!" I cried suddenly.

"You do not," said he, "for you are destroyed too."

"Will! Ynysfor!" I cried, in sudden panic, using his Bardic name. "Ynysfor! If it's all Illusion, are you also destroyed? What are you, Will?"

"I AM *not*."

"You deny that you exist, then?"

"I do not deny it: for if I do not exist, how can I deny?"

Then that many-coloured goat from Hafod Uchaf got up-wind from me. I could see him, and the wind brought him, and his small feet clicked on the rock. Somewhere very high up the lambs were yelling because of the frost between their two toes. Steadily the tide of mist rose, while the sun went down in a glory of cloudlets like little green fish-scales.

"I don't believe you!" I cried again. "It's real, I tell you; *real*."

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"Have you never said to yourself in a dream, 'Now I really am awake'?"

"Yes. But why should I dream all this?"

"Why are dreams ever dreamt?"

"They say, to save the mind from some shock too terrible for it."

"And what shock could be more terrible than the ending of all things? The heavens are rolled up as a scroll: in the twinkling of an eye the earth, and all that in it is, consumed as with fire. What shock could be more violent than that?"

My hair tingled on to its ends with horror. "I will not dream!" I cried. "If I am a naked soul lost in the Absolute, at least I will know it! I dare not love Dream with the love I have given to the real world; I will count three, and wake! One—two——"

"You cannot," said Ynysfor.

"Three!" So I opened my eyes. Darkness was quietly settling down among the hills, where the voices of plovers floated. Then I lay down on my face, and rubbed it in the wet grit of the road.

"I *will* wake up!" I cried.

"You will dream that your forehead is all bloody," said Will. "But how will that wake you? If there is no more Time, there is no Future: therefore you can never wake."

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I wiped the misty glass of my watch with my thumb.

"It is ten minutes since you told me that the world was ended."

"The action of a dream may cover many weeks, and yet the dream itself only last a few seconds."

"How long am I, then, dreaming this?"

"One moment of time—the moment of the world's ending."

"And how long will the action of the dream last?"

"For ever. If there is no time, Eternity coincides with a moment. You can never cease dreaming."

"But if I suffer Illusion, I exist: if I dream, I am. I cannot be cheated into a belief that I exist."

"Suppose that you exist. . . ."

"Then *you*: have you no existence outside my dream?"

"If I have, it is in utter isolation. There is no more Space, therefore there can be no proximity, no communication, only utter isolation. For no soul can any other soul exist. If I do exist, in this isolation, how can I say 'yes'? The communicative *me* you only dream."

The moisture from the mist collected on my

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hair, and two drops rolled over the dried blood on my cheek.

"What you have been saying is a pack of paradox," said I. "Nothing can both be and not-be."

"On the contrary, it is on the exact balance of Being and Not-being that existence depends. I will show it. All things—all Time, all Space, all Mind—*perish*. If Time could survive the destruction of Mind, then it would be possible for the act of destruction to become complete, then would Mind *have perished*: but because Time cannot survive it, the existence of all minds must hang for ever poised on a moment, the moment of their destruction, dreaming that Time and Space still are, exactly balanced in an eternal dead-lock between Being and Not-being. That is the infinite Dead-lock, causing the infinite, convincing Dream of men: and so an Illusion of Time, of Space, of Self, as still existent, arises."

"In fact, the end of the world has made no difference whatever to anything," said I. "Since it is impossible to know that it has ended, everything goes on exactly as before. I might prove conclusively in some paper that the world had ended, and myself and that paper with it three issues before."

"It makes absolutely no difference to you,"

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said Ynysfor, "since you can't believe it."

"Man! Man!" I cried, suddenly raging. "What do you want to *make* me believe it for? If you know it is ended, why can't you keep silent?"

"It is the truth."

"But you will never convince anyone."

"Never."

"But if we shall never know, it makes very little difference whether it be true or false."

"No, no: perhaps not; to you."

The scratches on my face were smarting. "Not *now*," I said.

"Now?" He played with the word, as if to remind me that it was meaningless.

Then a young girl trotted by on a grey mare, nervous of the lurking night. I stood up, and fitted my pipe to my teeth.

"I must get on with my dream," I said; and left him.

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JOSEPH was eight, Nellie seven.

Nellie found *Time* hanging on a beech-bough in the wood behind the house. She mistook it for a stocking, and plunged her arm into it to see what was inside. There was nothing: so she caught hold of the toe and turned it inside out.

Just then Joseph came running up. They sat down on the trunk of a tree. Joseph was minded seriously.

"Nellie," he said, "we are very young now, only a few years of past remain behind us: what they hold for us I cannot tell: but one thing is certain, at the other end lies Birth."

Nellie shivered slightly. "How can you remind me!" she said. "I swear to you I don't feel a bit younger than I shall at forty. And what is gained by brooding on Birth? One cannot alter the inevitable."

Joseph smiled. "Why, Nellie, I swear you look as old to me as when I shall see you for the last time! Ah, I remember as clearly as if it were to-morrow the day of your funeral: a windy, drizzly day—Lord, what a cold I shall catch! I shall die soon after, myself—ah, how it all comes forward to me! Dear, dear! Ah,

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me! Forty years of happy married life! There is little behind us now, my dear; but what a comfort to the young is the memory of a happy future!"

"You forget the earlier time twenty years ahead of us. What a struggle we shall have to pay our bills!"

"Well, yes; I suppose it is a symptom of youth, but memory is always clearest of that which is most distant: why, I can recall every detail of the day they will make me Lord Mayor. I remember——"

And so he rambled on.

"But the past, the mysterious past . . ."

"Don't talk about the past, it frightens me!" said Nellie. "Who can tell, even young as we are, what has happened to him? What misfortune lies behind him?"

"We must trust in God," said Joseph gently. "If He thinks fit to bring calamity upon us, that all may have been right in the beginning."

"Amen, my dear; and yet, if only one's eyes could pierce just a little into the mysterious past, even from one moment to the one before: I should feel less frightened of birth, I think, if I knew just when it had happened: that I might be postpared to meet it."

"My dear, we are not meant to see the past: we should accept it dutifully, as it goes.

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Sufficient to the day—why trouble, then, about a yesterday, that once was even as to-morrow?"

Nellie rose and walked over to the tree where *Time* was hanging.

"What are you doing with that stocking?"

"I am turning it right side out," said Nellie.

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"EUREKA!" the Professor cried, and disappeared.

I was hardly prepared for this.

Mathematical professors are not magicians, and have no business to vanish suddenly and without due warning. Moreover, at the moment of his disappearance, there was a curious whistling explosion, a sound like that of igniting hydrogen; of air rushing into a vacuum: the papers on his desk were caught up in a sudden whirlwind and pirouetted for several seconds over the floor. For a moment I was too dazed by the concussion to think clearly: then I got up and rushed rather wildly about the room. For it is difficult for any man to be sure how he would act when so astonished.

But I had hardly assured myself that there was really no bodily trace of him left in the study where we were working together, when I noticed a pair of boots on the hearth-rug. Now it is one thing for an agitated man to see a pair of boots on the hearth-rug, and to go to put them in a corner without really giving them a thought: but it is a very different matter to find a pair of feet in those boots, sharply severed at the ankle; with bone, flesh, veins, skin, and sock cut as clean and clear as in a sectional diagram. For a few moments I simply

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stared: then one of these boots moved, almost an inch. I confess that I was very nearly frightened. I made a rush for the door, but conquered my nerves and turned back again: and lo! while my back had been turned, a pair of legs—trousered legs—the Professor's trousers—had attached themselves to the boots. And they were growing!

They were complete to the knee: the veins were welling with blood, but none spurted out: and as I watched with fascinated eyes I saw the cut surface gradually rise like water in a lock. It was the most uncanny thing. I pressed my hand upon it, only to feel it lifted by a gentle, even pressure as the Professor's femur extended itself: and I remember noticing that though my thumb had stoppered a brimming artery, not a drop of blood stained it.

After that I think I must have fainted, as folk will, simply from excess of the unusual: for the next thing I remember is the Professor—the whole of him—standing over me and talking excitedly. I looked up in a dazed and bewildered fashion: he was waving his arms about, and crying that he had Found the Way: then suddenly he thrust his hand as it were through a hole in space; for it vanished completely: he deliberately plunged his arm up to the elbow in—nothing; and drew it out again.

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"But it's so easy," he kept on repeating; "easy as winking. Why didn't I ever think of it before?"

"Think of what?" I asked desperately.

"The Fourth Dimension," he answered. (Now I ought to mention that we were together writing a book on "Multi-dimensional Perspective.") "Here have we been fooling around after Imaginary Roots, and Functions, trying to mop up the mess Einstein has made, when all the time the Fourth Dimension was no different in kind from the other three that we are familiar with."

"But I don't see——" I began.

"No, of course you don't!" he barked, and settled into the full stride of his lecture-room manner.

"My assumption is that the Fourth Dimension is just another dimension: no more different in kind from length, say, than length is from breadth and thickness: but perpendicular to all three. Now suppose that a being in two dimensions—a flat creature, like the moving shadows of a cinematograph—were suddenly to grasp the concept of the Third Dimension, and so step out of the picture. He might only move an inch, but he would vanish completely from the sight of the rest of his world."

"But the sections," I interrupted; "why

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should I see you in those horrible sections?"

The Professor raised his hand.

"I am coming to that," he said.

"Then suppose that instead of returning all at once—smack, flat, which would be difficult unless he had a vacuum prepared to receive him—he inserted his feet first, and so gradually slid back into the Universe. It is evident that his fellow-creatures, during the process, would see him in ever-changing sections, until he was once more completely back in their space. Now I worked this much out last night in bed: and all the morning I have been cudgelling my brains to grasp in which direction it could lie, this dimension at right angles to length, breadth, and thickness. But all of a sudden——"

I could contain myself no longer.

"This is wonderful!" I cried. "This is power! Think of it! A step, and you are invisible! No prison cells can hold you, for there is a side to you on which they are as open as a wedding-ring! No safe is secure from you: you can put your hand *round the corner*, and draw out what you like. And, of course, if you looked back on the Universe you had left, you would see us in sections, open to you! You could place a stone or a tablet of poison right in the very bowels of your enemies!"

He passed his hand across his forehead.

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"Heavens!" he cried. "Could I really do all that?"

"Of course you could," I answered excitedly. "There is nothing you couldn't do. Only make haste to explain to me which this new direction is, and we'll hold the world in fee!"

"It's . . . it's . . ."—he flapped his hands helplessly. "How can I explain?" he said. "It's just the *other* direction. It's *there*!" he cried suddenly, trying to point, with the result that his forefinger and half his hand vanished from view.

"Hold my hand," he suggested, "and I'll try to pull you out."

I took his hand, and he gradually slid feet first out of sight, till soon there was nothing of him left but a pulsing hand that tugged at my arm. And then Catastrophe fell on us. Just what happened I shall never know; whether it was through tugging against my resistance, or whether he was too excited to notice what he was doing, or whether he simply wished to address some remark to me; but the unhappy man thrust his head back into space: and instead of thrusting it into vacancy, he thrust it into that exact spot occupied by a heavy writing-table. Now there is an axiom that two objects cannot occupy the same point in space at the same time: and the result of disobeying it was

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hideous. There was a terrific splintering of wood, almost an explosion; at the same time his hand closed its grip right through my arm, vanishing from view. The whole room was littered with splinters and dust, mixed almost into a mash with blood and brains. . . .

But his body was never found; and for all I know it is still floating just outside our space, perhaps only a few inches from the armchair where it was used to smoke and read and theorize.

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MONOCULISM: A FABLE

ONCE upon a time there was a king. . . .

Or, no; rather——

Once upon a time there was an eyeglass; to be more particular, a monocle.

But that was in the days when even Queens wore monocles.

It belonged to a Queen.

Cats may look at Kings, and smile, and smile, and still be cats: but more often they turn their wicked green glances against Queens. So, although her eyesight was perfectly good, this Queen wore a monocle, because it had a vacant, virtuous, disconcerting stare, against which few cats could long remain cattish.

It was very round, and smooth, and polished like a piece of Royal Green Soapstone. Some people were so polite as to address it as Your Majesty, and even to speak of it as His Majesty the King: but this ceremony was far from universal. It was so transparent that she could see through it whenever she wished, but it always magnified things a trifle. She wore it at the end of the orthodox short silk string that the Archimandrites had woven for her, so that she might never lose it. This was the legal, spiritual bond which united them, and by virtue of which she occupied her throne; but in addi-

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tion her Fairy Godmother—whoever that may be—had given her a magic Fastener: and whenever she let the glass dangle freely and think it was forgotten, flashing little annoying scintillations from its two so polished faces into the eyes of the Court, the secret spring would whirr angrily and the silk string grow suddenly taut and evident, and it would be snapped back to its place somewhere near her heart. Then the Queen would draw it forth with dignity, slowly, and hold it up between herself and the world. As I have said, it magnified somewhat: but she drew her own conclusions.

He was very round, and transparent . . . but he was an integral part of the Constitution.

And they both lived happily—well, for some time afterwards.

But one day the Queen discovered that the Ambassadress of a certain foreign Court wore —in secret, of course—*pince-nez*. This, besides being immoral, was, and is, against the laws of the kingdom. Although both these lenses were so arranged as to bring into one focus the poor lady's two divergent eyes, and give her a very clear and stereoscopic view of things, the Queen immediately demanded her recall, for fear that this dreadful *binocular* habit might corrupt her Court.

The Queen of the neighbouring country then

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wrote a stately and heretical letter, full of much heretical reasoning, and a great deal of very sound—though heretical—sense. "WHEREAS," this letter began in Gothic capitals, "all creatures have two eyes (excluding Polyphemes, and such-like barbaric broods), and two eyes cannot see through one the same lens, the Binocular System must be regarded as the more in accordance with Laws Human and Divine; for by the mutabilities of Eyeless Fortune one lens may become lost, or damaged, or in some other way distraught, and so useless; then how shall the widowed Queen, if she have not a second lens, be able to make those dispositions of her forces that may be rendered necessary to her defence? Should you not, therefore, give immediate orders to the Archimandrites that in future all Frames and Rims be constructed to hold two lenses; that both lenses be fixed by the same Ceremonial and at the same Convention . . ." —sentiments which roused this honourable Princess to such a cold fury that she nearly cut short and spoiled a perfectly good war on which she was at the time engaged in order to attack this heretic neighbour; but when in conclusion her Royal Sister went on to describe various so-called *Telescopic* schemes, whereby the single eye using a combination of lenses of all sizes and shapes could attain to powers impossible

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without such aid, she was rather disposed to smile, as at a foolish Mania: for did she not know that her own eyeglass, for all his roundness and transparency, nevertheless hampered her vision somewhat by his exaggerating tendencies? How, then, could a series of glasses do other than destroy vision altogether?

"Added to which," she was fond of asserting, "it is Immoral." And, of course, the Archimandrites agreed with her.

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JUNGLE

THE Queen of Issaca pressed gently against the marble pillar. All the hot blood of her young heart drummed in her ears, and her knuckles gleamed white. Round in a glorious maze of scents swirled the incense from the golden braziers: the glittering hall divided into sharp pin-points of light, little glittering stars of light that swelled suddenly to misty circles as her eyes filled with tears.

Tears ?—

But that is another story.

Mellicles of Cos came quietly through the colonnade, a dark shadow walking out of the sunlight. He saw that her eyes were wide and shining.

" Majesty," he began, in the voice of a comforter. But his words died at the sight of her round queenly shoulder.

Eyes that come out of the sunshine pierce slowly into shadow: Mellicles, unseeing, watched where she watched.

Under the gloom of an alabaster fret, shining like black steel in the shadow, crouched Jasan, hugging his mountainous knees. Presently he shook the golden rings in his lips, and Mellicles saw him. Presently he uttered

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some dim ancestral croon of the Congo jungle.

Heavily the Queen lifted her mind from its reverie, and saw what her eyes had been fixed upon. Jasan crooned on, his yellow eyes turned upon unseen mangroves and snaky pools. Syrono caught at her breath, listening, tapping a slight time with her fingers on the marble at her side. Out of the vast thunders of Jasan's chest the notes came quietly like the song of a Pamphylian bird; sank low and away into a solemn rumbling of beaten drums; the measured and slumberous thumping of thunderous drums.

Again the gold twinkled on his lips.

"Where does it come from, this Ethiopian gold?" mused Mellicles. Vague memories of the Halicarnassian traveller crowded into his mind. "*Perhaps the one-eyed Arimaspi purloin it from the Griffins.*"

The voice of Jasan was weaving a solemn and a tense tune out of three notes, and he beat on his thigh with his fist to its endless rhythm, leaning his head slowly from side to side. Thunderously low was the first note, booming among the pillars: and he hung upon it, so that the other two notes only deepened it. Queen Syrono stood stiffly by her pillar, her pale eyelids narrowed to a slit. Through them

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she saw festooned creepers hanging from Atlantean trees, and an endless pattern of apes crawling upon them. Mellicles saw something fierce and ancestral creep into her face, and hung back in the colonnade, watching her. Jasan the slave seemed to swell into an ebony god, and the remorseless booming of his voice faded to a low wind-moaning. Suddenly a clear note crept in, like a flute, as if there was a dance of slim Ethiopian girls in his mind. He straightened himself where he sat, singing clearer and wilder, his voice rising and dancing and crying higher and higher. Syrono swayed to the lilt of it, the cruel joy of it: up his voice soared into a shrill barbaric piping, and the steady drumming of his fist kept the time, till the Queen saw the whirling of black limbs in the moonlight and a half-glimpsed, distorted creature lashed to a stone. Round swirled the dance, eyes and teeth gleaming, rings jangling, knives shining in the pale light; and vanished like a vapour. Jasan crouched forward again, humming slowly, insistently, like a snake-charmer, rolling his eyes monotonously. Presently they grew fixed in a stare, and for the first time he seemed to see the Queen.

She tottered forward a few paces from her pillar, with a sob of her breath, hands clutched tight. Jasan sprang suddenly to his feet,

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muscular and stark-naked, towering like basalt.

Mellicles drew a little golden knife from his girdle and flung it. Its jewelled handle gleamed suddenly under the negro's chin.

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THE CART

I

THERE have not been many children with such yellow hair as Ursula Wortley's. It was divided over her forehead in two, like halves of a Hesperidan Apple, and stretched tight and metallic behind her ears, and twisted into two tight pigtails at the back, knotted with black ribbon. The colour would have looked even brighter if her face had not been so pale, and the two eyes in her face so pale too. When she was small it had hung in ringlets: but by the time she was eight or nine the curl had left it. When she was small her mother used to call her into the drawing-room if people were come to tea, to show them Ursula's ringlets, which she would wind round her own shapely white thumb to show them off; so when they became straight Mrs. Wortley felt it as a personal grievance. But she still used to call Ursula in to tea. "Ursula," she would say, "is such a funny child: simply killing!" Ursula used to hear her as she came slowly to the summons: her cheeks would be aflame by the time she found herself at the tea-table, butt of affection from people she did not know. Many of Mrs. Wortley's friends were very witty people: and to talk over a child's head, and twist recondite

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eccentricities out of a child's remarks, is an easy chance for wit. Ursula would smile easily, and with each remark flounder deeper. They would laugh—at the quaintness. Down in the kitchen things were not different: Ursula used to run there for refuge until one day Cook burst out laughing at something she said, and told her she was a Cure.

It is possible that Mrs. Wortley twisted Ursula's hair into pig-tails to increase the child's quaintness.

Ursula was passionately fond of her father, but he was generally away. She loved him mostly because he loved her seriously; he was a big man, with no sense of humour, and very silent. They used to go for walks; when Mr. Wortley said two or three words, and Ursula two or three, and neither had need to pick them. He never told stories about her, as her mother did, before her face. Ursula knew all those stories. She had seen them grow, from some dropped remark, some stumble in expression, into an elaborate fiction. She often had to clench her hands to prevent herself crying out that they were lies. She knew just when the ladies would laugh: and then turn to see if she was listening. Oh no; she was not listening: she would be gazing at nothing. The expression of her face never changed.

"That child," Mrs. Wortley once said, "has

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no feelings. She has no temperament. Her father has no temperament, and I am afraid she takes after him. I honestly believe she is incapable of affection; she treats me as if I was part of the furniture."

That night her father started abroad for a long visit, on business: and when Mrs. Wortley came upstairs she found Ursula crying into her pillow. She laughed beautifully.

"Why, you quaint child!" she burst out. "Fancy crying like this! Anyone would think your father was dead!"

"*Dead!*" cried Ursula, sitting bolt-upright in bed. Her two pig-tails stuck out behind, her eyes, with terror, bulged before.

"No, you little goose!" laughed Mrs. Wortley. "Daddy's all right, and he'll be back in a few weeks."

Ursula lay back in bed. She was not crying now. Her eyes were bright and hard. She was seeing a mole, where it had lain that day in the garden path, a dank streak on the shaded softness of its side, its four pink hands stiff to the air, and a faint smell from it. She knew it was not a mole at all, but her father. Mrs. Wortley rustled away and left her.

Next day, the usual summons was sent to the nursery, and Ursula went. From the hall she heard voices.

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"She really is an extraordinary child; she is devoted to her father. The funny little thing got it into her head last night that he was dead, and I found her crying her eyes out. When he is at home she follows him about like a little dog. I have watched them sometimes when they thought they were alone; they are the drollest couple. Why, listen to this"—and she began to read aloud.

Ursula's first thought was to rush in and tear the letter from her mother's hand. How had she got hold of it? It was one she had written, with hours of pain, when her father was away the time before; had written, and filched the stamp, and posted it herself. It was full of those queer turns of expression that made Ursula dread her own tongue, but which were safe in her father's keeping. But instead she stood stock-still in the hall, listening. Someone began to titter. Ursula turned and climbed slowly up the stairs again.

"Nellie," she said to the maid who was mending by the nursery fire, "tell mother I won't come."

"Well, you *are* a cure!" said Nellie.

2

If neither Ursula nor her father was blessed with a temperament, Mrs. Wortley made up

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for it. She was a creature of the most volatile moods: thin she was, with a Rossetti-bush of auburn hair that stood out round her head: so she wore jade green, or mauve sometimes. She was subject to sick headaches: it was part of her temperament, and when she had one she had no power of control, but thought she was at death's-door. She was constantly afraid of death: that, too, was part of her temperament.

When Nellie took Ursula's message, Mrs. Wortley simply shrugged her shoulders.

"Isn't the child strange?" she said. "I have no control over her: none whatever. I wash my hands of her."

When Ursula found that no punishment followed her disobedience, she made a resolve that she would never do what her mother told her again.

But it was not a resolve she kept, even for twenty-four hours. It happened so: the Wortleys' house was a tall, Victorian one, with a basement kitchen; so that when on the next day Mrs. Wortley went to bed with one of her headaches in the room below the nursery, she was out of the servants' hearing. She called to Nellie; but Nellie was downstairs with Cook. She called, "Nellie! Nellie! Nellie!" with a wild panic in her voice; for her heart was leaping about in her breast like a fish.

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Nellie did not hear: but Ursula did, and terror in her mother's voice put terror into her own mind too. She ran down to her.

Mrs. Wortley lay on her bed, gasping and rolling her eyes: she flung the flaming bush of her hair from side to side of the pillow. Her face was very red: and she had taken her dress off. She did not seem to see Ursula, and kicked with her legs. Ursula could see her legs kicking in the mirror over the bed too: they looked unspeakably funny.

"Mother," she said, "you do look funny!"

Mrs. Wortley took no notice of her, but still rolled about, panting. The child took a sort of delight in watching her physical degradation. Presently Mrs. Wortley noticed her.

"Quick!" she gasped. "Get me some sal volatile! I'm dying!"

All Ursula's terror at the word returned to her: again she saw that beautiful dank mole, its four pitiful hands. She could not find the bottle.

"Quick!" screamed her mother. "I'm dying this minute!"

Ursula gave it up, and flung herself on the bed, sobbing. Mrs. Wortley began to weep too, in self-pity: she caught the child to her.

"You poor little thing," she said. "What will you do without your mother? Will you miss

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her, very much? Tell me you won't forget me, darling."

Ursula only went on weeping with terror: terror of death.

"Will you come and put flowers on my grave sometimes? Little celandines in the spring, and narcissus?"

The picture was too pathetic for Mrs. Wortley. She almost began to howl, and presently her over-wrought condition had its natural result: she fainted.

She lay suddenly all white and still. Ursula screamed. She put her hands to her ears to stop the sound, and screamed again. Then she rushed downstairs. It was characteristic of her distrust of every one that she never thought to tell the servants: she ran straight out of the house, intent on reaching the doctor; and pelted down the road. All the while Death, like a huge mole, ran at her side. A big cart overtook her: she caught hold of the chain like a boy and swung herself into the back. It was full of long, irregular packages done up in sacking: lumpy packages, and the cart jolted her about on them. The driver's back had a straw on it: and now and then the smoke of his pipe wisped back over his shoulder. She could see the top of his whip too: and when the cart swung about she was bumped and

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bruised. She saw those things clearly: they seemed to cut deep into her memory. She never forgot them. She felt that Death was with her somewhere in the cart, but did not dare to look for him. She was afraid of those packages, even before she saw what they were. They were sheep's carcasses. The sacking burst on one: she could see right into its gutted belly. She moved, and her hand slipped on a piece of suet.

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THE SWANS

Two ugly women in summer dresses stood under a tree: a fountain of a tree, with heavy scent streaming from its pink-and-white burden of blossoms. There was dapple sunshine shifting on the lawn: a nightingale singing before its time. Daisies and dropt flowers from the trees played at damask on the grass. The tall woman pulled down a bough towards her: hid her face a moment in the flowers: let it fly back:

"What is its name?"

"I don't know."

They forgot about it: not noticing the blossoms sticking to their hair. They swung their hands a little, walking away behind a dark shrubbery, not to appear again. The nightingale tuned his voice to new excellencies: and next across the lawn a tiny boy, all round, and as ill-balanced on his legs as cuckoo-spit on a grass-blade. He ran slowly and seriously, but as if to stop running were to fall. Like a grey woolly ball on pink stalks, he too wavered round the shrubbery, leaving the lawn as if empty.

It was set with seats, some shadowed, some in the sun, where a few people were sitting: for the garden was almost public. In one seat was a knitting woman. Two children in ugly skimped frocks were playing far away under the sun-

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shine. The elder ecstatically threw an armful of mown grass into the air : it fell upon the other, so that she capered about : but it was too far off to smell the steam of the grass. Then they ran both together to the knitting woman, surprising her from behind. One of them wore a dress of tight white cotton, dog-toothed at the edge, and was quite straight : she was about twelve, and had not much black hair, but she tossed it up against the breeze, and the holes in her stockings did not show much. The other may have been ten, and though she was not so thin, was no better shaped, but wore her pink frock stiffly, as though it was padded. They surprised the knitting woman from behind, and took away from her the baby that was with her : it could toddle slowly. They lured it away with enticing, provocative sounds, telling it to catch them. They would show themselves from behind the shrubbery for a moment : the baby chuckled and began to wobble towards them : then they would flee back like the wind, screaming in quite real terror. The baby would fall over ; and when it got up, start back again towards its mother. They showed themselves once more, and it all happened over again. Sometimes they would stay hidden for a long time, giggling in a high tone as if concocting some wicked plot.

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Beyond the shrubbery, away to the right, was a small lake: the trees grew down so low over it that you could only see the reflections of the people on the far side; and there were two swans that broke up the reflections by leaping across the water, three-quarters out of it, from side to side, clapping their wings with a noise like a carpenter driving nails. One of them clambered out on to the further bank: it was darting its head angrily and pecking upwards as if someone unseen was teasing it. It grew very angry, ready to murder anyone small that should pass.

Meanwhile the hopeless game of catch by the shrubbery still went on: and I was waiting to see the little one cry. Presently it would grow tired, and feel the unfairness of it all, and fall down weeping. Each time it toddled slower and slower. Then two delicate-pretty little girls came into the garden, dressed one in soft white, the other in flame: they walked the flowered grass as if it was nothing earthly, treading with a lark's quick lightness. The baby ran towards them in mistake, and sat down suddenly once more.

But the two delicate children went towards the lake; following the path that led round it to the other side, where the swan was still flashing furiously up and down in the sunlight.

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The baby got up no more, but lay there still and quiet. It did not cry; and the sisters came and danced round it, making goading noises, running up to it and away again, but it lay still. So they took runs, and jumped over it and over it, lower and more wildly each time. It rolled a little sometimes; and when they nearly trod on it, they shrieked. But they grew tired of this, and stopped. As if her ingenuity had dried up, and she could think of nothing better to do, the pink sister began to roll about violently. The straight white one stood irresolute. Then she began to dance; not gracefully, but with great skill, turning and pirouetting and doing most ingenious steps—in front, behind, in front: first clutching the bottom of her frock in mockery of a skirt-dance, then waving her arms in the manner of a ballet. She danced listlessly; it was a memory test, the recapitulation of a lesson once learnt. Presently the sun shone behind her, showing a quite ludicrous outline—the thick stuff petticoat under her cotton frock. Then the pink one stood up and whirled round and about furiously, arms and ugly frills flying out grotesquely, till she grew giddy and fell dispread on the grass.

But the two little girls who had started round the lake had paused under some dark trees; between, sunlit midges were dancing against the

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black background. Presently they went on: they seemed suddenly to turn black as they passed under a low stone arch, then bright again for a moment in the framed sunlight beyond it, before they disappeared. The baby began to crawl back towards the knitting woman: the elder two to quarrel on the grass with the anger and heat of giddiness. The swans were flashing ferociously up and down in the sun: while the two little girls had passed out of sight towards them.

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He killed me quite easily by crashing my head on the cobbles. *Bang!* Lord, what a fool I was! All my hate went out with that first bang: a fool to have kicked up that fuss just because I had found him with another woman. And now he was doing this to me—*bang!* That was the second one, and with it *everything* went out.

My sleek young soul must have glistened somewhat in the moonlight: for I saw him look up from the body in a fixed sort of way. That gave me an idea: I would haunt him. All my life I had been scared of ghosts: now I was one myself, I would get a bit of my own back. *He* never was: he said there weren't such things as ghosts. Oh, weren't there! I'd soon teach him. John stood up, still staring in front of him: I could see him plainly: gradually all my hate came back. I thrust my face close up against his: but he didn't seem to see it, he just stared. Then he began to walk forward, as if to walk through me: and I was afeard. Silly, for me—a spirit—to be afeard of his solid flesh: but there you are, fear doesn't act as you would expect, ever: and I gave back before him, then slipped aside to let him pass. Almost he was lost in the street-shadows before I recovered myself and followed him.

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And yet I don't think he could have given me the slip: there was still something between us that drew me to him—willy-nilly, you might say, I followed him up to High Street, and down Lily Lane.

Lily Lane was all shadows: but yet I could still see him as clear as if it was daylight. Then my courage came back to me: I quickened my pace till I was ahead of him—turned round, flapping my hands and making a moaning sort of noise like the ghosts did I'd read of. He began to smile a little, in a sort of satisfied way: but yet he didn't seem properly to see me. Could it be that his hard disbelief in ghosts made him so that he *couldn't* see me? "*Hoo!*" I whistled through my small teeth. "*Hoo! Murderer! Murderer!*"—Someone flung up a top window. "Who's that?" she called. "What's the matter?"—So other people could hear, at any rate. But I kept silent: I wouldn't give him away—not yet. And all the time he walked straight forward, smiling to himself. He never had any conscience, I said to myself: here he is with new murder on his mind, smiling as easy as if it was nothing. But there was a sort of hard look about him, *all* the same.

It was odd, my being a ghost so suddenly, when ten minutes ago I was a living woman: and now, walking on air, with the wind clear

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and wet between my shoulder-blades. Ha-ha! I gave a regular shriek and a screech of laughter, it all felt so funny . . . surely John must have heard *that*: but no, he just turned the corner into Pole Street.

All along Pole Street the plane-trees were shedding their leaves: and then I knew what I would do. I made those dead leaves rise up on their thin edges, as if the wind was doing it. All along Pole Street they followed him, pattering on the roadway with their five dry fingers. But John just stirred among them with his feet, and went on: and I followed him: for as I said, there was still some tie between us that drew me.

Once only he turned and seemed to see me: there was a sort of recognition in his face: but no fear, only triumph. "You're glad you've killed me," thought I, "but I'll make you sorry!"

And then all at once the fit left me. A nice sort of Christian, I, scarcely fifteen minutes dead and still thinking of revenge, instead of preparing to meet my Lord! Some sort of voice in me seemed to say: "Leave him, Millie, leave him alone *before it is too late*!" Too late? Surely I could leave him when I wanted to? Ghosts haunt as they like, don't they? I'd make just one more attempt at

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terrifying him: then I'd give it up and think about going to Heaven.

He stopped, and turned, and faced me full.

I pointed at him with both my hands.

"John!" I cried. "John! It's all very well for you to stand there, and smile, and stare with your great fish-eyes and think you've won: but you haven't! I'll do you. I'll *finish* you! I'll——"

I stopped, and laughed a little. Windows shot up. "Who's that? What's the row?"—and so on. They had all heard: but he only turned and walked on.

"Leave him, Millie, before it is too late," the voice said.

So that's what the voice meant: leave him before I betrayed his secret, and had the crime of revenge on my soul. Very well, I would: I'd leave him. I'd go straight to Heaven before any accident happened. So I stretched up my two arms, and tried to float into the air: but at once some force seized me like a great gust, and I was swept away after him down the street. There was something stirring in me that still bound me to him.

Strange, that I should be so real to all those people that they thought me still a living woman: but he—who had most reason to fear me, why, it seemed doubtful whether he even saw me.

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And where was he going to, right up the desolate long length of Pole Street?—He turned into Rope Street. I saw a blue lamp: that was the Police Station.

"Oh, Lord," I thought, "I've done it! Oh, Lord, he's going to give himself up!"

"You drove him to it," the voice said. "You fool, did you think he didn't see you? What did you expect? Did you think he'd shriek, and gibber with fear at you? Did you think your John was a coward?—Now his death is on your head!"

"I didn't do it, I didn't!" I cried. "I never wished him any harm, never, not *really*! I wouldn't hurt him, not for anything, I wouldn't. Oh, John, don't stare like that! There's still time . . . time!"

And all this while he stood in the door, looking at me, while the policemen came out and stood round him in a ring. He couldn't escape now.

"Oh, John," I sobbed, "forgive me! I didn't mean to do it! It was jealousy, John, what did it . . . because I loved you."

Still the police took no notice of him.

"That's her," said one of them in a husky voice. "Done it with a hammer, she done it . . . brained him. But, Lord, isn't her face ghastly? Haunted, like."

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" Look at her 'ead, poor girl. Looks as if she tried to do herself in with the 'ammer, after."

Then the sergeant stepped forward.

" Anything you say will be taken down as evidence against you."

" John ! " I cried softly, and held out my arms—for at last his face had softened.

" Holy Mary ! " said one policeman, crossing himself. " She's seeing him ! "

" They'll not hang her," another whispered. " Did you notice her condition, poor girl ? "

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CORNELIUS KATIE

THERE are fewer gypsies, probably, in North Wales than in any other part of Great Britain, for two reasons: it is a hard, poor country, and though one True Traveller can find plenty of sustenance there (for as folk know more of hunger themselves, so they grow more hospitable), it is not easy to fill nine mouths where farms are few: and, moreover, be Jenny the mare never so sturdy, she has only grass in her stomach, and a heavy van at her tail that she cannot pull up a hill as steep as the side of a house. Nor are there many rich spots, where money can be made to tide you over the barren tracts: you may teach your girls to jiggle little tambourine dances on the sands at Barmouth while the Visitors are there, and your boys to tootle for them upon tin whistles: but it is not a rich game, and they charge half a crown a night for the little plot by the sea to moor your van. Food, too, is not easy to come by in a seaside town.

But a few gypsies there are, of the poorer or the more adventurous sort. One evening of a wet spring that I was climbing a hill road in the direction of Aberglaslyn, soaked with rain and hungry inside, I came upon an untidy van by the roadside, stoppering the mouth of an old quarry. It was a black night; the moon,

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though full, showing scarcely a scud through the clouds; and I saw their small window glowing many yards down the road. But I took it for a *caravan* (your true gypsy calls his vehicle simply a *van*), in which some amateurs of the road, with their primus stoves and paper serviettes and other paraphernalia, were kidding themselves that they were enjoying a holiday, and that it was costing them less than living in a hotel. So I quickened my step, for it occurred to me that here might be the chance of a supper, which I would beg; and then, after starting on my way, I would creep back quietly and sleep fairly dryly between their wheels. But as I drew nearer, seeing the wind was in my face, my nose soon told me that these were gypsies of the genuine sort.

Within, moreover, was somebody drunk; who made such a rocketing and hullabaloo as nearly bounced the old van off its wheels. Presently I came abreast of it: and because it had been carelessly backed against the tunnel-mouth, with shafts not upreared, but lying half across the road, I stumbled over them on my face in a wet puddle. Almost at the same time the door in the back of the van opened; and from where I lay by the wheels I saw one, two, three half-scarified figures fling out into the tunnel, and the door slammed behind them: then, as if

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more scared of the dark tunnel than the rain in the roadway, they turned like rabbits and had scuttled between the wheels by the time I had found my feet. Meanwhile the noise was less, and changed to a somnolent droning, as of one who is determined to sing hymns but has forgotten both words and tune.

Next I could hear footsteps, going cloppity with a loose sole, round a bend in the road; and a child's voice humming the *sospan fach.*

"Shush!" said a voice from under the van. "Is that you, Florrie? Diawl, you'll be waking dad!"

Florrie stopped suddenly at the half-bar: and thinking I might fare further and worse, I drew a half-damp candle-end from my coat-lining, lit it, and crawled under the van too.

"Shush, you," said the same voice, "or you'll be waking dad." Dad's singing had imperceptibly changed to a snore. So no one spoke: but, having a light, we crept through to the stone tunnel, which was drier than most such tunnels are. Florrie had a basket with her, and a can of milk: she had been foraging; and having struck lucky with an old couple at a farm in virtue of the wet night, had brought away half a loaf, a small lump of bacon of the green sort (cut from a gristly part), and a hunk of cheese. Also, seeing the hen-house could not

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be seen from the back door, she was not without eggs; but neither they nor the bacon were of much use to us without a fire: so we stuck the candle-end to a piece of slate in the middle, and crouched round on our haunches, mumbling the bread-and-cheese. Opposite me was Florrie: she had a face shaped like an egg, tawny, with drooping eyes, and black hair stiff as briar-bushes crammed under a huge straw hat garnished with pink ribbon; she had ear-rings too, that glittered. In any other walk of life you would have judged her to be eleven or twelve: but I guessed her at sixteen, though her figure was straight as a board. Next her was a smaller child, built round and firm, with small eyes; and clothed from head to foot in a green covert-coat, that lapped round her nearly twice. They called her Gwennol, which in Welsh means a swallow, and is not a usual name: so that I wondered who had given it her, till Florrie explained that it was the parson at Newtown who had christened her, and that he had called her twin-brother Cornelius. Cornelius, poor little devil, sat beside me in his shirt only, his knees tucked up into the breast of it. There are no children with better manners than the gypsy: and though it was more fear than kindliness that had made them share supper with me (for it would have been little trouble to have

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grabbed the lot, and left them whimpering), yet we were presently quite good friends. Dad was called Will Katie: he had been to the army three years, which had upset his heart; and he found beer the best physic. When he could he made things—pegs and baskets: when he couldn't he lay in bed and roared; and drank, and roared again. This was one of his roaring nights. Mother was laid up with twins in the top bunk: when dad was in a roaring fit he would swear they were not his; so she tried to keep them out of his sight. To-night he had sworn they were none of them his, and so had kicked all the children out of the van. He had caught Cornelius a clip over the ear from which he was still whimpering: for Cornelius was asleep when the row began. Cornelius was a queer, grotesque mite: he had a great bulgy forehead, as if his brain had water: thin yellow hair, a crooked mouth; and face so begrimed that you could hardly tell nose from cheeks. Huddled inside his great grey-back he looked like a half-carven idol.

Having little better to do, I pulled out a small block of paper and struggled to draw a rough sketch of Florrie and Gwennol: it was so damp that the pencil often bit through the sheet. They called it a "*photostook*," having never heard of drawing, and seemed mildly excited;

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the modest-minded Gwennol being careful to draw down the covert-coat to hide even her stumpy young ankle. After, I showed it to them; they sidled up to look at it, and were so shaken with giggles that they dared not give it more than one quick glance at a time, out of the corner of one eye. But not so Cornelius: he stared at it long and full, then stretched out a skinny and rickets-twisted arm for the pencil.

"'Ere," he begged. "Lemme 'ave a go. Lemme."

He thoughtfully bit off the end of the lead between his teeth, and, clenching the pencil in his fist as if it were a stick, he started to trace sheet after sheet of the most astounding outlines: horses, bulls, trees, queer slant-eyed faces; hills and clouds, flowers; this filthy, half-witted young shrimp of a ditchling was drawing with an ease that Frith might have envied. His yellow eyes glinted among the smudges in his face: lips parted, and a high flush in his cheeks, while his teeth chattered still with the cold: he seemed possessed. The idea had hardly occurred to me when his subject changed: to my amazement, he began drawing obscenities of which even a gypsy could hardly have knowledge at his age. I felt as in a dream: Florrie and Gwennol had tumbled asleep on each other in an untidy heap: and the candle gave a slow

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lurch and guttered out. As if the spell had been broken, Cornelius broke out whimpering again in the darkness about the welt he had had on his ear, and would not be quiet till I cursed him: and soon I too had toppled over on my side asleep.

I was the first to wake, numb and stiff, agued from my wet clothes: I stretched myself in the grey cock-time and wondered whether I had been dreaming. But the indented sheets lay round me as witness: I gathered them together and crept away softly, and examined them at leisure. To say they were high works of art would be absurd: they were not, but the facility of their realism, their mimetic character, was amazing. Whether Cornelius Katie will ever be a great artist I don't know: already he is a most skilful draughtsman. Those last few scribbled obscenities I destroyed; and then, when I next came to London, I sold the set of drawings to a dealer for more than I expected.

But you may imagine that the story I spun of how I came by them was a very different one from this.

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He was vaguely aware that there were ladies in the room: that he must pull himself together. He was vaguely aware, was John Anderson, that what wine he had drunk was now singing in his head like a choir of young birds. Perhaps another glass would quiet them . . . he reached for the champagne at his side, and safely steered it to his lips. After that Heaven and Earth were rolled up as a scroll: chaos reigned.

What next he remembered was the sound of indeterminate voices booming in his ear: he could distinguish nothing at first, but their thunderous quality hurt him: he wanted to stop his ears, but his hands seemed to have floated away, somewhere far, far out of his reach; he could see them miles away, lying on the arms of his chair, and it seemed quite impossible to bring them back all that distance. A memory began to stir in his mind: the mediæval story of the Adder, who, not having the wherewithal to stop her ears when the charmer charmed, ingeniously inserted the tip of her tail in one, and lay upon the other in the sand . . . but try as he would, this was even harder than controlling those rebel fingers.

"If I was a mermaid," declared John Anderson, in a voice whose loudness surprised him,

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—" if I was a mermaid, I should have a tail to stop your row with, damn you ! "

" Stop kicking, and let us take you home," said one of the voices.

" Take me to the shea," he suggested. " I want to be a mermaid, and comb my *beautiful* hair ! "

They did not answer : they heaved him up by his arm-pits, and trailed and trundled him out into the night, down the cobbled street of the little seaside town : his toes rat-tatted on the cobbles all the way, but he could not control them, those disobedient toes : he could not make them walk in a sensible fashion, tried he ever so, but was compelled to let them trail.

" I want a tail ! " he cried desperately. " I want to be a mer-mermaid ! "—and he fell asleep.

His bearers stopped for breath, and leant him up in an angle of the wall, where he remained propped, forlorn and drooping : his hair tousled all over his face, his narrow chin making a dent in the stiff front of his shirt.

They stood looking at him, panting.

" I can't stick much more of this, Charlie," said the first, a stout and elderly man, heavy-cheeked and moustached like a colonel. " The young blighter's heavier than he looks."

" You ain't going to give up, are you ? " said

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Charlie, a sallow, dark young man with ringed fingers, a ready-made tie all askew. All the power of his face had gone to his nose, which was large: chin and eyes were small.

"You ain't going to give up, are you? How often do you think you would have got home at night if the boys were afraid of a bit of flesh, eh? Do ath you'd be done by, that'th me, Jameth."

He drew himself up, and James sighed.

"P'r'aps you're right," he said. "Let's heave him a bit further, anyhow."

So they took a fresh grip, and trundled and bumped him for another hundred yards or so. They had reached the market-place. A raw, yellow fog had come up from the sea, through which the flaring naphtha-lamps of the various stalls glared eerily. Something loomed at them suddenly out of the murk; it was the horse-trough.

"Charlie," said James, groaning, "I'm done. I can't heave this blighter another inch."

They dropped him with a bump; but he did not wake.

"Well, then," said Charlie, "I'll tell you what we'll do: we'll shove his blasted 'ead in 'ere for a minute, and then p'r'aps he'll be able to stand on his two feet."

It is not an easy matter to put a drunk man's

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head in a horse-trough, but these were experienced. Together they hoisted their burden, and suddenly plunged him, head and shoulders, in the trough. There was a loud explosion as all the air in his lungs escaped with a rush, sousing both well.

"Damn," said James; and Charlie said "Damn" too.

They lifted him, then ducked him again. This time he was half awake, and held his breath. Suddenly he went rigid as a poker, forcing them to set him on the ground again: there he stood, his long, greased hair streaking down his face almost to his mouth, which was smiling beatifically: his dress-coat and boiled shirt unbelievably bedraggled: speckled with wisps of straw and other dirt that the horses had left in the water. A half-drowned great spider, thankful for this miraculous rescue, made its escape slowly across his face, then tumbled to the ground. He stood stock-still, his arms stretched straight in front of him, swaying slightly: his breath still held till he could hold it no longer—and then, one quick gasp.

A look of utter bewilderment spread over his face: he breathed once again—tentatively, as it were: then again, and more easily.

"Why!" he cried. "It's as easy to breathe as air!"

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He drew several deep breaths, each seeming to surprise him more than the last: he moved his arms slowly, once or twice, as if in breast-stroke.

"Am I moving?" he asked the world at large.

"By heavens!" cried Charlie, bursting into a loud laugh. "The silly blighter thinks 'e's swimming!" He slapped both his knees in a paroxysm of enjoyment, swaying his body up and down with peal after peal of laughter, till he caught a fit of coughing and had to sit down on the head of the trough to nurse the joke.

"You see," Anderson explained very seriously, "I can't manage my tail yet: won't waggle properly: shwimmin' with these bloody flippersh quite ho-hopelesh."

James was equally serious.

"It is difficult," he admitted, "till you get used to it. But try leaning forward just a leetle, and then shove off. It'll soon come to you."

Anderson swayed forward, and staggered a few paces, waving his arms like wind-vanes: turned half-left, gave a sudden lurch—and the fog closed behind him.

"Lord!" cried Charlie, as soon as his laughter would let him. "'E thinks 'e's a fish. Didn't I tell you it was worth stickin' to, eh, James?"

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—And he dug James where his ribs might be supposed to lie.

"Give my love to the Queen of the Mermaidth!" he shouted; and a distant call of assent was wafted back to them through the fog: silence, then far off a voice chanting:

"And the land-lubbershlyin' dow' belowbolobolo,
An a shlan' lubber shlyin' dow-lo-bo."

For awhile Anderson was content to float aimlessly about, admiring the sights and sounds of this submarine world. From time to time some entrancing grotto would heave in sight through the water, lit by gorgeous and translucent jewels that seemed imported straight out of the Arabian Nights. In front of each grotto there would be strange dark monsters moving; behind, in the full light, were piles upon piles of treasure, with perhaps an entrancing mermaid brooding over them. Several times he tried to steer his course to the mouth of one of these caves of delight: but always the currents, or some other strange influence, seemed to seize him, and he would find himself swept past. Strange fish passed him too; curious gloomy monsters that swam by him in the fog. At first he was afraid of them, for they were as big as he was: but when he found they did him no harm he grew bolder and would keep straight on, swimming easily with great strokes of his tail (which had

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now become quite manageable), his arms waving gently in front of him to keep his balance.

Once a great Leviathan, its two bulbous eyes brilliant with fire, came lumbering towards him over the sea-floor, rocking and rattling in a way that faintly reminded him of a motor-bus. Its big luminous eyes almost fascinated him: but he was just able to stagger out of its path before it bore down upon him.

And then, suddenly, loomed up on him through the water an octopus: a huge, monstrous, horrible creature with one flaming eye in the middle of its belly. Anderson was almost upon it before he could check himself: he stood there transfixed with fear: and the monster stood still too, regarding him with its one unwinking eye. For a few moments they stood in silence: then his very fear forced Anderson to speak—to say anything to break the spell.

"Shtrange," he mumbled confidentially,—"shtrange how shea-water do fuddle head."

From somewhere in the gloom above its eye the creature shot out a tentacle and fastened it on his collar.

"*You come with me*," it said; "*and you come quietly!*"

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LEAVES

DURING the summer the plane-trees are one of the pleasantest things in London. In the autumn all their leaves fall off. The leaves grow dry and hard: and when the wind stirs them they rattle in an unearthly way. The sound of a company of plane-leaves trotting along the street on their edges is very frightening. Sometimes a dozen or so of them may get entrapped in a small back court, and rattle against the walls: and every now and then one of them climbs up and scrabbles with all its five long finger-nails on the window: then a steady gust makes them sound like water pouring into tins, or ice melting.

I think it was in the year '97 that Pedar Vasič, the Montenegrin poet, whose terrible death at the hands of the party of King Nikita during the War shocked even those outrageous parts, first came to London. He was little more than a boy then. He had been educated at Constantinople and Paris, and was still quite unknown even in his native country: but already he was an enthusiast for the "Jugoslav Idea" for which he afterwards did so much: and already his Slav soul delighted in subtle analyses of the more melancholy aspects of the human mind. He took two rooms in the bottom of a house in

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Chelsea. The window of the sitting-room looked on a little back court, where the autumn leaves danced like mad. He was very nearly afraid of them, when he first heard them, because their rustle was so reminiscent of many different things, yet never exactly like them. He was glad the gas-jet burnt brightly. He had distinguished himself in brigand scrimmages at a very early age: but this sort of thing was different. It made him feel uneasy.

Then an idea came to him. What a wonderful ghastly story he could write about those leaves: about their driving someone insane! So he took some paper and began to play with the idea. He wrote a line or two: then stretched himself and laughed. It was too far-fetched. After all, what were they? Leaves. No one could ever really persuade himself they were anything terrible for long. It was absurd: *fictitious*, in the worst sense. What a pity it was, he reflected, that one had to be so far-fetched nowadays to produce an uncanny suggestion. To be exact, those leaves had frightened him for the space of three seconds, and even then they had not disturbed him—him, a sensitive—very deeply. He imagined himself to have committed some calculated and unnameable crime: perhaps a criminal might be hounded to confession by them. But the man who

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commits calculated and unnameable crimes is seldom a sensitive: and it would need a hypersensitive ever to be driven out of his reason under any circumstances by leaves. He had a sudden revulsion of feeling against the whole artificial clap-trap of modern fiction.

Outside in the court there was a sudden rush and flurry like a pouncing cat. He shuddered.

But, after all, why not? The Uncanny lies in style as much as subject. If he wrote up his theme well, artificial or no, he might make it effective. If he could *succeed* in making the tale weird, surely, artistically, he would be justified. He began his story: gradually thought out his plot while he composed.

The story he actually wrote was about two children: two children at night, with someone dead in the house . . . he was not sure who: perhaps their mother: perhaps father. He stopped to stare at the Cyrillic script before him, frowning. How very much easier it would be in bald French! But Vasič was a patriot, and already he was absorbed in his work. Then he pictured them creeping out of their beds, stirred by the fearless curiosity of childhood: chilling their feet on the landing oilcloth as they crept to the room where they were not allowed to go.

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Then there would be a rustle of leaves in the street outside, and their little hairs would prick with fright as they huddle together. It ceases, and presently they go on, turn the handle, and are in the strange bitter-smelling room. They creep across the taper-light to the white bed, and turn back the sheet, wondering at the white face under it: nodding and whispering to each other, warm hands clasped together. They have no fear of it: but by instinct they hush their voices: stare very seriously at this image of their mother. The tapers flicker, casting strange shadows on the face: but still they are not afraid. Then the leaves begin again. They rattle and leap outside, climb and scrabble with their five long finger-nails on the window-pane. The children start, catch their breath: then suddenly they begin to scream. . . .

Vasič paused, utterly absorbed. Outside in the little square courtyard the plane-leaves began their curious trotting, round and round in circles: then swirled up, crackling angrily against the pane. Suddenly the window burst open: the gas-light flickered and dived: something black, huge, noiseless, flew in, darted round the room. Vasič sprang up in terror, calling fiercely on Saint Vassily, battling to keep it away from his face. It dodged him uncannily and padded softly against his ears: the room

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seemed full of shadowy winged shapes: he fought at them with his hands: then lost his head and screamed aloud.

But, after all, it was only the leaves.

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MARTHA

I

THERE are not many streets turning off Limehouse Causeway, but there are more of them than you would think; or see, unless you looked carefully. One of these is called Bird Court. It is a queer cobbled alley that crawls on its stomach under a low arch, and finally runs its head against the blank dock-wall. The bead-hung windows of Messrs. Ti Fung & Co. look upon this court. Their doors open upon the West India Dock Road, but the Chinese in these parts never have windows opening upon the same street as the door does: for quite good reasons of their own. If the houses are so built, they board up the windows, or frost them over.

Upon one side of the door in the Dock Road there is written, in large white letters, "Ti Fung & Co., English and Chinese Restaurant." On the other side is a sign in Chinese. Once inside, you will see no door upon the ground floor: only steep deal stairs. At the top of these stairs is the long, low room whose windows look on Bird Court; it is divided up by a few bead curtains and fringes of bits of painted glass. Other doors open off this room, but the signs upon them are all Chinese; and the ostensible

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business of the restaurant is carried on here at rows and rows of marble-top tables, where parties of young sailors sit eating curry-and-rice and other dishes that are not easy to diagnose. They are surprising, these young Chinamen, with their quiet, well-cut, lounge suits and sleek black hair. You will hardly see better dressed men in Piccadilly.

Lottie was a waitress at Messrs. Ti Fung; for all the waitresses there are English. She was a tall, blonde creature, with peroxided and scented hair, and covered in powder from head to foot. As she came down the gangway between the tables the Chinamen would one and all reach out and claw at her dress, trying to hold her back. Sometimes she would slap their hands; sometimes she stopped to laugh and talk, sitting generally on the table, while the Chinks would hold the ends of her apron-strings, stroking them or pressing them to their cheeks; and some would stroke the line of her arm with an approving finger. Lottie was a favourite among the Chinese, but the few Europeans who came here for their meals would never look at her. Wonderful creature! She had "waited" at Ti Fung's now for ten years, and had never once lost her temper. It was not her business to lose her temper.

Presently she went out for an order for Chicken-

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chestnuts and Tea, and came back with a steaming dish in one hand, and with the other led Martha. Martha solemnly carried a small cracked tray, with the teapot and the little handleless cups. She was a very solemn child, with a thin wisp of dull, black, crinkly hair that was tied in a stiff pig-tail with a twist of striped flannelette. Otherwise she wore black satin, like her mother; a frock very short, and cotton-topped silk stockings full of holes and ladders. They had been meant for a longer skirt than Martha's, for the cotton began well below the knee: and they had been meant for rounder legs. Her face was thin, too, with high cheek-bones, and large mouth, and narrow almond eyes that betrayed her paternity. Her expression was slow and seldom changed, though her movements were quick. Children in the East End do not shrink under a blow: either they fling themselves upon their attackers, biting and scratching like desperate things, or they wriggle like eels; and Martha's home-life had taught her a very great deal.

She had come with her mother to Ti Fung's ever since she could remember: and before that too, when she used to ride in on her mother's shoulder and the Chinamen would beg to be allowed to dandle her in their arms for a minute: and brought her toys, and later would teach her

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strange little songs to dance to on the table-tops. When she appeared with the tea it was strange to see these Chinks change, to see the inscrutable dreamy look that Lottie had banished come back into their eyes: they bowed gravely to her, and ordered preserved ginger and lychees for her, and talked to her with all their politeness. And yet no one would have said the poor wizened little thing was an attractive child. She seemed listless, hardly to understand what they were saying. She made no response to their gentleness: even when some reeling Scandinavian blundered by, and they crooked their arms to prevent him brushing against her clothes, she did not seem to notice it. But it was not necessary: enough that she was a child: more, that half her blood was yellow. Her mother, who understood Chinamen, was satisfied. When they gave her flowers, she would smile slowly, and let them try to stick them in her hair: but there was hardly enough to hold the stalks.

But she always began before long to beg for paper; and the yellow men, who understood her whim, used to save old sheets of it for her, folded in their pockets. When her pencil was all worn away one of them brought her a whole stick of Chinese ink, with a little brush, and showed her how to mix it in a saucer: and she used it up so incredibly fast that she was always

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begging for more sticks of ink. A great deal of it got on her face, or on the floor, and there were always black splashes on the walls. A number of mothers would have condemned the practice as " messy " ; but Lottie was one of those large-minded people who do not object to dirt. Their room would have been filthy anyhow. But Lottie did object, on other grounds: she thought it " queer."

" 'Tain't's if," she used to confide to her cronies,—" 'tain't's if the kid could draw for nuts: she can't. Carlo's Lotta, now——"

Carlo's Lotta was certainly an amazing child: at a very early age she had shown a wonderful power for caricature, and by the time she was fourteen she earned enough money to keep Carlo and his wife in a state of drunkenness. She made it by going to all the prize-fights and drawing crude sketches for the sporting papers. But Martha couldn't do this: she very seldom drew people, and when she did there was never a shadow of likeness in her drawings: mainly she would pile up odd bundles of rubbish on a table, and draw them: beer-bottles, onions, and such-like: or she would draw things from unexpected angles, or make up things out of her head. As Lottie said, it was " queer."

But Lottie soon gave in, for she decided that Martha was altogether a bit " queer ": there

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was, therefore, nothing to be done, provided that the child did not become expensive, but to teach her to shop and fetch the beer, and rub plates round with newspaper. That, to Lottie, comprised the art of housekeeping: otherwise, if the child kept the Chinks amused, why, it did her no harm, and was good for business.

So presently Martha began as usual to beg for paper, and young Shan Ting delightedly pulled out a whole wad that he had kept for her: some of it back-sheets of letters, paper bags—anything he could get. Martha smiled impersonally at the sight of it, without any attempt at thanks; but Shan Ting was able to produce a pencil too, so Martha soon squatted down with the pieces on the floor and began to cover them over with her strange scrawls. The curious thing about her was that she hoarded her paper like gold until it was used; but in her drawings, once done, she took no interest whatever. Generally she left them, crumpled, wherever she happened to have done with them. But Shan Ting and his friends crowded round her, for there was an Eastern quality in her notions of design that appealed to them rather than to Lottie; and yet her conventions were not in any strict sense Chinese, because her design was not entirely in the flat, but advanced and receded in a way they could not understand.

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Lottie flitted on to other tables, leaving Martha to entertain the group: which she presently did in her quiet way, saying little and smiling little. She was one of those difficult people who seem entirely oblivious whether they are caressed or beaten, but treat all folk alike with a complete detachedness.

It was not usual for Europeans to take any interest in her: but presently one rose from the table where he was sitting over Ti Fung's wonderful tea and sponge-cakes, and joined the group. Wal Henderson was a tall fellow, youngish, and shabbily dressed, like all the Europeans of the quarter, wearing a tight "choker" round his unshaven throat. He had the sullen look of most East-enders, beaten yet provocative: it would not have been easy to recognize the Art Student of a few years back, so completely had he gone under. He elbowed the Chinks aside like a true Britisher, stood scowling down at Martha: but she drew on wholly absorbed, entirely oblivious that anything out of the ordinary was happening. Presently he picked up one of the discarded drawings, looked at it almost with a sort of rage and thrust it into the pocket of his coat. Then he sat down again and lit a cigarette. Lottie came back and bore Martha away, and the group broke up.

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2

Lottie usually lay abed till late in the morning, fed by Martha on tea and kippers. She was surprised, therefore, to hear a bang at her door at about ten o'clock.

" 'Oo's that ? " she screamed.

Something was answered in a bass voice.

" Well, yer can't come in," she called again, and added in an undertone: " Go and see what the blighter wants, Martha, there's a dearie."

So Martha slipped out of the door, and found herself face to face with a sullen-looking man. Inquisitive young heads were peering at them from the stairs below.

" Wodjer wornt ? " she drawled, one hand on the door-knob for quick retreat.

" Want your ma," the man growled out.

Martha half opened the door to shout this information through. Lottie, recognizing the inevitable, poked out a head bristling with curling-pins.

It did not take Wal Henderson long to explain what he wanted: an ordinary enough request; —someone to do for him. He lived in the next block of tenements, and thought Lottie might have time to come round and " swep up " before going to Ti Fung's.

Lottie thought otherwise. She was too fond of her bed. But she stopped to gossip.

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" 'Ow's Liz ? " she asked.

Wal shook his head slowly. " Gorn," he said. " Las' monf."

" Well, I never," commented Lottie.

Wal threw his head back, sucking noisily, like one with a bottle. " In the 'Firmary."

" Well, I never," repeated Lottie ; " it did 'er quick."

" Merciful quick. But she was at it a long time afore *I* knew."

Lottie wiped away a sentimental tear.

" A nice girl, your Liz : pity she drank."

Wal felt something choking in his throat, and exclaimed fiercely : " I'm bloomin' well aht of it.—But I ain't got no one to do for me now : that's why I looked you up. Well, so long, miss."

Lottie stopped him with a gesture.

" 'Ere," she said, " 'alf a mo'. What about the kid ? "

" Martha ? " said Wal, looking up at her suddenly, but hiding his cunning.

" Yes."

" She ain't got no sense," said Wal.

" She's more sense nor you think ! " cried Lottie hotly. " She'd do you all right."

Wal appeared to ruminate.

" She might," he admitted presently.

And so it was fixed up that Martha should do

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for Wal Henderson for eighteen pence a week.

Wal did not smile to himself as he went back to his room, because he had long given up the habit of smiling. But he felt a certain satisfaction.

Presently he went to the chest of drawers that stood in the corner on one leg, like a naughty child, leaning against the wall. With a knife he opened the handleless top drawer and fished out various bits of paper, pieces of charcoal, and pencils: he walked thoughtfully about the room putting them here and there: stood back to watch the effect, and then went out.

When Martha arrived in the morning she knew pretty well what to do. Wal was still asleep, breathing stertorously, his lower lip drooping. Martha hunted around for the tin teapot, found it half full of stale tea, and so put it on the gas-ring to heat up. There were some kippers wrapped up in newspaper; but she could not cook them till the tea was hot: and she did the tea first because she could see Henderson had been drinking the night before.

Meanwhile there was nothing to do. Martha looked round and saw paper and pencil within reach. Almost without thinking she began to draw: a vague sea of melancholy Chinese faces, a memory of Ti Fung's. Starting from the front, she drew them, one by one, growing

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smaller and more expressionless in the distance. If you had asked her why they were melancholy, she could not have told you. It did not matter to her, once they were drawn, whether they had laughed or cried. Wal's snoring had suddenly ceased: but she was too absorbed to notice it. Presently she began to frame the faces round with a heavy black line.

"'Ere!" Wal shouted out. "Drop that and get on with it!"

Martha jumped towards the ring: the tea had been boiling some time. A cup of it strangely seemed to improve Wal's temper—or perhaps it was the smell of the frying kippers. But while he was drinking it she managed to finish the framing line unnoticed.

Wal had a damp cloth for "washing up" instead of using newspaper: so Martha rubbed the cup and kipper-plate both with it, and left hurriedly to clean up her mother's breakfast. When she was gone, Wal carefully drew his legs out of bed, and ran a judicious thumb down his shins. They were rather badly bruised. Presently he lit his pipe, and then pulled on his trousers: tied his "choker," tightened the canvas belt round his waist, and put on his waistcoat. Before putting on his boots he looked long and carefully at the drawing, and presently hid it away in a chest under his bed.

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So things went on for several weeks, and the pile of drawings in the chest under the bed grew. Once, when Martha had gone, Wal took paper and pencil and made a series of neat little sketches. Every now and then he stopped to admire his work, and then went on. When they were finished, he got out Martha's latest drawing, a straggling and unfinished design of house-tops, and set it beside them: scowling more and more at the comparison. The first thing he did was to scribble all across his own work; and the next was to feel a sort of jealousy, an absurd wish for revenge; and to take out the little pile from the chest. He screwed the top one into a ball and flung it into the corner. But he repented and went after it. He flattened it out carefully, then damped it and went over the back with a hot iron, and put it back safely in the pile.

Next day, when Martha came, she found him already up, and his breakfast eaten. Instead of setting her to clean up, he told her to sit on the edge of the bed and made a rapid and very flattering drawing of her profile on canvas. (This canvas had been an old landscape of his; but he had scraped it and covered it over days ago with ground-white, ready for this.) Before beginning to use any colour he called Martha over to see it, and asked her if she liked it.

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She shook her head.

Wal clenched his fists, but kept his voice in control. "Ain't it pretty enough for you?"

Martha said it wasn't that.

"You just don't like it?"

"That's right," said Martha.

"Why don't you like it?"

"Dunno."

Wal felt she was right, but his jealousy grew quite out of control, and he beat her soundly with a soft leather strap. She rushed to the door, but he was before her: finding retreat cut off, to his surprise she remained quite passive, hardly making a sound while he hit her: his jealous fit vanished, and left him in an abyss of misery.

The rest of the morning he spent teaching her the use of oil-paints. She got herself covered in paint from head to foot, just like any other student. During the afternoon he took out all his stack of pictures from the bottom drawer, and in a sort of sublime melancholy set himself to scraping the canvases and cleaning them and preparing them afresh. This was a very hard thing for Wal to do.

The first hard thing that he had done in his life was coming to live in Poplar: but that was not so hard as he had expected. He came for two reasons. The first was that there was no

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other place where he could afford to live and devote himself to his art. The second was that Liz was a barmaid when he first met her, and that she would be happier there than among his friends. His love for Liz died slowly, and by the time that it was gone he was absolutely absorbed into the life of the quarter, and neither could nor wished to leave it.

The second hard thing that he had done was after he discovered that Liz had another husband, and that she drank. His love was by this time nearly gone. But he kept her with him and nursed her almost until she died. The daily battle with the disgustingness of life wore away the finer side of his nature, hardened the vulgar side that had first admired Liz. Presently he realized that it was impossible for him ever to be the artist he had dreamed of being, and that it was impossible for him to leave the life he was living.

These were two hard things for Wal Henderson to swallow: especially as the latter had come about through doing what he thought to be right, and through sticking to Liz.

The third hard thing was when he destroyed his own paintings in order that Martha might paint on the canvases.

Martha knew nothing of this, and used the materials he gave her without thought. She

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worked all day and worked hard at her painting. In the evening she murmured " S'long " in a conventional way, and slipped out.

" She's all brain and no heart," said Wal to himself. " I've thrashed her till she was sick, and I've given her a chance she has never had in her life before—and she doesn't care for me either way more than a doorpost."

" S'long ! " she had said : just the same as the first day that she had fried his kippers.

But meanwhile his sullen face danced before her all the way home, and she beat her clenched fists together to stop herself from crying.

Wal began to dream of the day when he should take a few of her drawings to a gallery, and an exhibition should be arranged, and the whole world should go mad about this pearl he had found in the gutter. He saw himself in the rôle of her guardian and protector—and, incidentally, her business manager.

He saw the honours due to a discoverer paid to him. And the memory of Martha's " s'long " interrupted him. She would throw him away like a worn shoe when she had no more need of him, he felt : but his queerly devotional attitude to art rose up to comfort him. The latent passionateness and sensitiveness of his nature were in strange contrast to her impassivity. It was the merely artistic temperament in con-

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trast to the temperament of a real artist, he decided.

He took her canvases and set them carefully by the window to dry.

3

One night Wal came home more drunk than usual. He had met an old friend of the days when he had first begun to draw. They had but the vaguest memory of each other, for Wal had never been to an art school: they had only met occasionally in odd Bohemian attics, where penniless fellows talked wonderfully of the pictures they were going to paint some day: and then had come soon the time when Wal went under, and his friends saw him no more. But the fellow had resisted all Wal's attempts to escape him, and borne him off to a disreputable and so-called Bohemian gathering, where his own appearance was in no way out of place. There they had made Wal very drunk, chiefly on Crême de Menthe: and when he stumbled into his bed the whole world seemed suddenly to reel out of his ken, and he slept like a log. He did not wake till very late: Martha was sitting by him with a cup of tea, watching him. When he woke she put down the tea and mixed him some salts. He drank them, and, because his head was so painful, cursed her: and she

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hurried away without doing any painting that day. Wal went to sleep again and slept until midday.

At midday he woke a second time, and felt in his pockets for his pipe—for he was fully dressed —wanting badly to smoke. But instead of it his fingers closed on a bit of pasteboard. He drew it out and examined it half-consciously:

"*Edward Macyntire, The Surrey Galleries.*"

Vague memories of the night before elbowed and jostled each other in his mind. Who was Macyntire? He must have been that fair Jew fellow, with the weak moustache. They had been drinking port when the man arrived, but he had asked for beer: and so they had all had a pint to keep him company, and then a gin to settle it before going on to the Crême de Menthe. The others had got noisy during the evening, but Macyntire had sat quiet, and it was not till the party broke up that he had shown how very drunk he was. He had been sitting on a sofa, one arm hung caressingly over the end, apparently talking to himself: when he tried to stand his legs gave way, and he sat in the middle of the floor, laughing weakly. They bore him off; and Wal, who could still stand and had a few wits left, offered to see him home in a cab.

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Macyntire had insisted on giving him his card before they parted, someone having mentioned that Wal was an artist.

Now he staggered out of bed and tried to collect his wits; could not, and spent a miserable afternoon loafing along the docks in the cool air. In the evening he came back and varnished some pictures. He took the pasteboard carefully out of his pocket, cleaned it with india-rubber, and set it under a tobacco-box. The next day he felt more capable of dealing with things.

He said nothing to Martha when she came; but after she had wiped the breakfast-things, told her that he was going to take her out of doors to paint. She made no objection, and he found her a quiet corner where she could sketch unmolested, a corner overlooking the Pool. In the foreground was a Norwegian timber vessel, and the little police-boats were fussing in and out of the shipping. To his surprise, she steadily refused to draw. He was furious. He had found her a subject and taken all the trouble of bringing her there—but no, she would not: and, recognizing the truth of the proverb about the horse and the water, he did not even hit her.

Presently she moved a few yards, the obstinate little wretch, and sat down quite contentedly with her notebook to draw something else.

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As soon as she was thus settled, Wal went home and took the packet of drawings from under his bed: chose out the best of the oils and did them up in a parcel together. He put on his collar and took a bus for Oxford Street: stopped at the Surrey Galleries, and gave Macyntire's card to the man at the door, with his own name scrawled across the back. The man looked at him doubtfully, but took the card: and presently Wal Henderson found himself talking to Edward Macyntire, saying he hardly knew what.

And so it was arranged that there should be an exhibition of drawings and paintings by *Walter Henderson* at the Surrey Galleries in the following January.

4

Wal staggered out into the sunshine, still slightly dazed from the night before the last. How had it happened? He did not know. Macyntire had taken it for granted that this was his own work: and, of course, Martha never bothered to sign things. It would not occur to her. Nor did she ever bother to enquire what became of her drawings after they were done.

Wal went home and found she had been making a careful drawing of a blind puppy, almost in one line; but neither a touch wasted

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nor a touch lacking; and there was no background whatever. Wal wrote "W.H." in the corner: leaded his thumb, and set its mark above. Then he went through all the drawings and paintings, signing them with his initials and his thumb-mark. The final step was taken: he was surprised to find how easy it was: when a thing had happened half by accident, the very idea of which in cold blood he would have dismissed, he felt no remorse whatever, no inclination to go back to Macyntire and explain his mistake. Fate gave him a shove and he slid smoothly.

It was not long before Wal managed to get a cheque from Macyntire on account, and took to shaving again every day and wearing a collar. It was not long, either, before Lottie began to get restive, and wonder that Martha should be absent all day, and never come with her to Ti Fung's, as she used. Young Shan Ting and his friends used to enquire after her; and when she still did not appear, neither did they come to Ti Fung's so often: for Lottie's own popularity was waning. It did not occur to her that anything might be amiss: for, after all, Martha was barely twelve years old. It was only that she thought Henderson was getting more than eighteen-pence worth of work out of her in the week: as, indeed, he was. But when

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she questioned the child, and Martha told her that Henderson let her sit in his room and draw, she grumbled at it as " queer," but did not think much more about the matter.

A few days after that Mr. Ti Fung summoned her to his office : and she wondered why. He loomed in front of her threateningly : a great dark mountain of a Chink, girt always with a blue baize apron.

" I hear," said he slowly, " that you are eensolent."

Lottie did not protest. She knew it to be his invariable formula ; that protest was hopeless.

" People do not stan' eensolence. You are dismiss' ! "

But Lottie hardly heard him. " *You are old*," were the words ringing in her head as she crept out again.

She was badly shaken, but a little crude rum made her feel better. She began to think things over dispassionately, and yet found it hard to admit that she was old. And yet it was true that her ascendancy over the Chinese had gone : she had to recognize that. Things were not the same as in the old days when Martha used to come with her to Ti Fung's. Her mind clung to this explanation in despair : she hated to admit that she was old : she would not admit it, and put it all down absurdly to Martha.

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Lottie paid for her drink in a dazed fashion and stumbled home in her high-heeled, over-trodden shoes. When Martha came in she flung a torrent of abuse at her, of which Martha understood not one jot, blaming her for all the misfortunes that had ever befallen them. Then she ended up saying that she should go to Henderson's no more; and that Martha understood: but said nothing.

Lottie went to bed debating in her mind whether to send Martha to a factory or to try and find some other more lucrative job for her. For Lottie had no intention of entering a factory herself. Presently she decided to try the factory, and then fell asleep. But when she awoke Martha was already dressed and gone.

Gone? Lottie was in a griping rage. Gone without even getting her breakfast: *that* was a dutiful child. And when she had spent half the night scheming for her future too!

Lottie jumped out of bed earlier than usual, and hurried through her toilet, preparatory to learning them both.

Wal had been out late the night before, and slept late. He had been dining with Macyntire, and they discussed the exhibition, which was just about to open. Macyntire had made him feel a little uncomfortable. Macyntire was a master of the art of Boom, whereas of the other

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arts he was only a very shrewd critic. During the last month he had given many quiet dinners to really good fellows: fellows who edited papers, or wrote art criticisms, or were well known as collectors. Then, over the port, he would quite casually bring out a few of Wal's sketches, and ask their opinion of them; generally adding that they were never likely to be popular, of course . . . but—he would spread his hands with a shrug, implying that one had sometimes to run an unpopular exhibition for art's sake, showing that *he* was a Good Fellow also. All the real people, of course, would recognize their genius; and probably run the show down, so as to buy Henderson's work cheap. Then the other good fellows would protest, and say that they at least would stand by him, and expose any such wickedness. All through December, therefore, there were veiled references to the coming exhibition in the papers: dark hints about its excellencies, darker hints about the characters of any who should dare to traduce it.

All this Macyntire, contrary to his use, told Wal; for he was surprised to find him more sensible than the average Unknown Genius: a man after his own heart. And he ended up by saying, half laughing: "The only pity, Henderson, is that you aren't an Infant as well as a Genius. If you were a young gutter-snipe,

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now, it would just account for those queer immaturities and unintentional crudities that I'm afraid of people falling foul of."

Wal, who was drinking his third glass of port, spilt it.

And so he had come home late, and feeling a little uncomfortable, and did not wake till he heard a terrific banging on the door. Martha was standing close by his pillow, pale and frightened, clutching hold of his blanket; and the door was locked.

"Who's there?" he shouted, and recognized Lottie's voice in the words that followed. He jumped out of bed and pulled on his trousers: then opened the door, nearly as angry as Lottie herself. Martha ran behind him and flung her arms tight round his waist.

"Come along out of that, you little devil, you! Didn't I tell you you wasn't comin' here any mo-er?"

Wal could feel the child sobbing against the small of his back, and his veins ran with a queer pride.

"What you been doin' to the kid?" he clamoured.

"What've *you* been doin' to her?" cried Lottie. "That's what I want to know. Ain't I 'er mother?"

"Fat lot of mother, you. What you been doin'

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to 'er? I'll get you lock-up, I will, chasin' the poor little thing till she thinks you're ready to murder 'er!"

Lottie answered slowly and dramatically.

"'Oo's 'er mother, you or me? Tell me that, Mr. Henderson."

"Who feeds her? Who looks after her all day? Who does she *love*?" he added triumphantly, bending back an arm to touch the child's shoulder.

Lottie stared weakly.

"Who's been father and mother to her both all this last month, while you were bluing yourself at Ti Fung's? Tell me *that*, miss. You say you're her mother: who was her father, then? Some sawny Chink? Tell me *that*, before you go hollering about your mother's rights!"

"Martha," said Lottie impressively, "I been a good mother to yer."

Martha sobbed louder.

"Ain't you comin' along of your *mother*?"

Lottie clung to the word desperately, like a talisman. She wanted the child: according to her lights, she was a good mother.

Martha clung tighter.

"No, she ain't," said Wal. "I don't know what you been doin' to make a kid leave its own mar; but that's what you done, and I guess it

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must 'ave been something terrible 'ard. Ain't you afraid of Hell for doin' the dirty on a kid, you devil?"

"She ain't done nothin'," said Martha. "On'y she said I wasn't coming 'ere any mo-er," she wailed.

Lottie stood limply and pathetically, like a dog unreasonably beaten.

"Fur Gawd's sake," she whispered, "let me 'ave 'er back!"

"No, I won't," said Wal. He felt so completely in the right, such a disinterested champion of defenceless childhood.

Lottie sprang forward, babbling furiously.

"What you want 'er for? What you been doin' to 'er, you lousy, you? I tell you it ain't right for a kid of 'er age to be away from 'er mar."

"I ain't done nothin'," he said slowly, "and I ain't a-goin' to do nothin', 'xcep' I ain't a-goin' to turn away a kid what comes to me for help: I ain't that sort of fellow. What you think I can get out of 'er? Why, nothin'! Only, I ain't a-goin' to let 'er back to be bullied by you, not if it costs me every penny I got to feed 'er!"

"You mean it?"

"That's right."

"Martha, are you comin' along o' me, or along o' Wal?"

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For reply Martha pressed her streaked face harder in Wal's coat.

Lottie rubbed desperately at her eyes, tottered a few steps towards them, then turned and began to stumble down the stairs.

"Oh, Gawd," she was muttering.

Martha relaxed her hold, and sank on to the bed, hiccoughing from her long sobbing, her eyes red and puffed. She lay there longing for Wal's comfort, but he stood motionless in the middle of the floor, hating himself. Bit by bit things broke loose in his mind, each with a sudden sledge-hammer blow. Memories of the early past: then memories of all he had meant to do for Martha. Then the thought of that exhibition of pictures by Walter Henderson. Then the memory of Lottie stumbling, childless, blindly out on to the stairs. All the pains of Judas took hold of him. He writhed as if he was caught in a net of cords, struggling to escape from what he had done. Suddenly he turned on Martha, and his face was livid as with rage.

"Get out of this!" he screamed. "Out of it! Out of it!"

Martha sprang to her feet in terror. "Out of it, damn you!" he cried. "Go to your mother! You can't stay here, I tell you! Out of it, curse you!"

He took her by the shoulders and half threw

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her out of the door, so that she fell all aspread on the landing.

"Hurry," he was saying, "get a move on, you little devil! And take all this truck along of you!"—he bundled up paints and brushes in a bit of sacking and flung them after her.

She lay huddled and ungainly and pathetic on the landing, not even sobbing, the paints spilt all around her, and he half kicked her across to the top of the stairs.

He slammed the door. "She's free of me now," he thought, "for ever." Things had come to such a pass that he could wish her nothing better.

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BEYOND the lodge gates was the old walled garden, the height of whose ramparts had once so awed him. Now there were bald footholds in the ivy, where boys had climbed over for what little loot remained. Trust Sussex boys for that. But there was little need; for as he passed up the drive he came to a place where a great piece of brickwork had broken away, making an uncouth frame to the tangle of jungled grass within. The plough still stood rusted into the earth where they had left it, when the last effort at gardening failed. He remembered finding them at it: old Star, who had once been a steeplechaser, tugging nervously and ineffectively: Laura and Josephine trying to steer the plough. He had laughed them out of it. Now all was wilderness: grass everywhere, and broken box edges; bedraggled lilac; roses crawling along the ground like worms, without flowers; a clump of deep crimson polyanthus, its leaves pale and elongated in the search for light. He stepped through the gap, exploring timorously; a scent everywhere of flowers and soaked dead leaves.

In the broken greenhouse unpruned peaches were setting: and on the potting-shelf was a silk dancing-shoe, full of water. It would not have

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been an unexpected thing to find there at any time.

But the chest in which he must look was at the house. He went on up the drive, almost shutting his eyes and ears. The place had been so many years dying, had lingered on in dwindling occupation for so long, that it was hard to believe that now it was really empty. As he passed the tennis-court, where, of late years, Star had been paddocked, he looked involuntarily for the mare, and, not seeing her, imagined that he almost expected to hear Josephine come galloping her down the drive; though he did not really.

And to the house, which he entered by the gun-room door, the key of which alone was not lost.

He passed through the silent hall, its floor cleared of furniture as if for a dance. He slid his foot on it; it was sticky, it wanted chalk. A green mildew limned eerily the features of the grotesques carved in the black oak fireplace, and light flooded in, now that the tall window curtains were gone; they had been of flame-coloured silk, a present from a Chinese emperor.

He remembered that the third stair creaked when one tried to tiptoe up to bed silently. Josephine, the youngest, had always stayed up

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last, dancing; or sometimes would get up in the middle of the night, when the others, who were nearer to being grown up, were thinking of bed, and come down in her dressing-gown and dance for a couple of hours or so; or start on a moonlight walk over the downs in dressing-gown and silk slippers. That stair creaked now. The damp had come through the wall and spread over the amethyst paper like a yellow leprosy. Bits of paper hung away from the wall, showing their underside; it was like a disease.

The chest was in a top attic, a sort of box-room that he did not remember ever to have been in. But the next room was Laura's. That had always been tidy, whatever chaos lapped it round: now, like the others, it was bare. He had sat there for hours, once, while Laura had played Mendelssohn on the gramophone, and Ursula commented: "Listen, now, and you'll hear real waves . . . there they are: golly, it's wonderful!"

It was the next room to that which had been Josephine's. In the perpetual, aimless general-post of the bedrooms, it was there she had generally slept. As he looked in now, he almost expected to see her, sitting up in bed with a toothache, her deep orange hair spreading over a pink, lace-fringed dressing-jacket, her clothes

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all over the floor. This room, too, was bare, but for an iron mattress stood up against the wall.

Back to the box-room. The chest was a huge thing, made of pine-wood, about nine feet by six. The lid was not properly shut; the leg of a toy horse stuck out. He lifted it. Here, as in geological strata, lay all the history of the sisters; all their discarded clothes and oddments for the last fifteen years. Right on top was the peacock-coloured evening frock that Laura had made for Josephine's fifteenth birthday. She had worn it to dance in that one night; a month later he had found her playing tennis in it. With it were a pair of combinations that it had been too much trouble to mend. The toe of a riding-boot poked up through more silk frocks. He moved these things about, groping blindly in his search. A little way down he came on their stays, discarded when stays went out of fashion: a little lower the trunk of a huge elephant, broken and leaking sawdust, projected between a sponge and one of Ursula's ridiculous white fur coats. He pulled out one riding-boot; it seemed a tiny thing, perched there on his palm, the beautiful soft leather worn as supple as a glove. Underneath was a heather-mixture tweed skirt. At first he could not remember, but something

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was struggling back. Then he got it: once, for half a day, a vague disquiet had rippled the tranquil lapse of the sisters; he had said he liked it, and Josephine had put it on, and there had been a faint uneasiness in the air, dissipated after a few hours. It reached to her ankles, almost, then. How small it was! People grow.

The further he groped, the smaller the things got, the stranger the fashions. He no longer found things he had ever seen. That extraordinary evening dress! Could their aunt ever have worn it? Then he remembered the photograph there used to be in the drawing-room.

Down at the bottom of all were two white babies' pelisses, with white down-frilled silk bonnets: and the awning of a perambulator. He lifted it out, and suddenly threw it down. Little squirming baby mice fell from every fold. They had made a nest in it, eaten a hole right through the middle.

When he had found what he searched for and come down to the hall again, he crooked his arm as if round a partner's waist, and whirled once or twice about the floor in an ecstasy of sentiment. The last five years had tumbled out of the chest as if from Pandora's box. All that beauty, youngness, sensitiveness, delicacy, free-

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dom—blessed freedom, from any thought and emotion: the tranquil *lapse*. Presently, he had conjured the place so full of ghosts that he stopped, frightened.

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THE DEVIL-STICK

If you take the road north from Ludlow, that curious town, and follow its dull pavement till the hills close in on it, you come presently to a wooded valley. Then, if it is raining, you will be well advised to turn into the wood by a little gate, as I did when I walked that road; for hidden in the wood there is an old quarry. The sky was a brown yellow, and the river a yellow brown, and the rain, when it came, so blue as almost to make me believe the impressionists, who are, as a rule, incredible people. Here I perched dryly under a ledge of old sandstone. The quarry was full of the distant echo of trains that went on murmuring and whispering all the long time from one train to the next, and then there were two day-dazed owls that circled about silently in the rain, and jays that screamed, and the patter of the rain very far up among the branches.

But presently I lit a fire, and made a stir-about of rice and currants, which are both light things on the back, though heavy in the stomach. Then I rummaged out my pipe from the lining of my coat, and lay back very contented, watching the blue clouds float out of the cave, till the sudden wind caught them and twisted them out of sight. Musing thus aimlessly, I got to think-

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ing of Long Jonathan and his Devil-stick, which he had taken from a drunken nigger in the West India Dock Road. The nigger was so drunk that he had butted a lamp-post in mistake for a policeman, and was lying in the gutter clutching his Devil-stick when Jonathan had found him. And, as often happens, I had hardly begun to think of Jonathan when he himself came scuttling and swearing into the quarry, with a wild haggard look on his face, and the rain leaving smutty tracks on the backs of his hands. We nodded together as old comrades; but he burst out chattering at once.

"Look!" he said, "look 'ee at the dibs!" And he began tearing half-sodden wads of notes from his hat, his coat, his boots; he seemed half drunk with folly, for I could have pocketed half of them without him taking notice; or clubbed him, and had the lot for very little more trouble. But curiosity and a few suspicions held me, so that I only kept asking for his tale.

"Tell me," I said. "What have you robbed, Long Jonathan? For you've made a good enough job of it. Or are you in the spoof trade?"

But he shovelled them up in an untidy heap, and began cramming them back.

"It's the stick!" he said, and drawing the

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little carved ivory baton from his coat, fixed his crazy Jew-eyes upon it. "I knew it would bring me luck, and now it has. For when I went to the Worcester races I had naught but a shilling lifted out of a pedlar's pocket, and then this stick—he up and spoke right out loud to the skies, telling me to lay the tail of my shirt on Lady Candy, which I did, and won; and won it ten times over again too."

"The stick spoke?" said I incredulously. The little man seemed half delirious; his tobacco-stained moustache was all wisped in the rain, and his pale rabbit-face flushed.

"Spoke!" he cried. "Poked its head out of my pocket and fair shouted in my ear. 'Jonathan,' it said presently, 'you've gotten enough; have done with the betting,' and sure enough the bookie lit for the Welsh hills before another race was run.

"Now, I had barely pulled out into the town that night for a razzle when two toffs come up, and addressed me in the friendliest, wanting a little loan, they said, to help them in what they called a small venture. Said I, I'd see them to hell first; and so I would, the whole long way, if the Devil-stick hadn't out and whispered to me to get inside a pub, as I was going to feel uncommon dry before ten minutes was out. But

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the very moment I'd twisted on my heels those two Johnnies had their pistols on me, and were trussing me up like a burst pipe. They shoved me into a car, and soon had every cent stripped off my skin, telling me all the time that they were gentlemen, and I should never have reason to regret the temporary embarrassment. Lord, I blasphemed till my teeth shook; and all the time the Devil-stick never said a word. They drew up soon at a country house, and whipped me into a room, where they untied me; and there one of them sat talking sarcastic and filling me whiskies, with a pistol in his off grip and an eye on the clock. I was still cussing myself and him and my luck, and the Devil-stick that had let me in for this, when the other Johnnie came back, at about four o'clock.

"'Bought?' said my man, cocking his gun at me.

"'Bought,' says the other. 'Bought and sold.'

"'Then we needn't detain our friend any longer,' said the first. 'Let's pay him his due share and say good-bye.'

"With that he started counting out notes. He gave me my own, and as much again for interest.

"'Gentlemen,' says I, 'your very good 'ealth, and may I ask how you done it?'

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" ' Sir,' says one of them, ' your very good 'ealth, and you mayn't.'

" With that they shovelled me up like a sack of coals, and tied my eyes (for it was getting light), and carried me off in the car. They didn't talk another word, but just pitched me out in a ditch and were gone before I could get my eyes uncovered, when I found they had carried me half-way to Tenbury. ' Jonathan,' says this little stick, ' get up and run like hell.' So I ran like hell, and fetched into Ludlow that night."

He stopped to fill his pipe.

" Yes," I said, " that's a good yarn, Jonathan, and does you credit. But who did *this* ? "

I fetched out the day's paper and showed him a paragraph. It described a country bank robbery—and described Long Jonathan, too, pretty minutely. He grinned his appreciation of my praise, and read it carefully.

" Country holiday—what ? " he said.

" Yes," said I, " and a good long one too. That's a good yarn, but a bit too good for the Gentlemen."

He gathered himself together and hurried off.

But I heard afterwards that he was arrested at Bishop's Castle, where he was telling a whole

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barful of folk how he had, on the Devil-stick's advice, just made his fortune out of a Welsh gold-mine. Any bulk of money always goes to Long Jonathan's hea

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A NIGHT AT A COTTAGE

On the evening that I am considering I passed by some ten or twenty cosy barns and sheds without finding one to my liking: for Worcestershire lanes are devious and muddy, and it was nearly dark when I found an empty cottage set back from the road in a little bedraggled garden. There had been heavy rain earlier in the day, and the straggling fruit-trees still wept over it.

But the roof looked sound, there seemed no reason why it should not be fairly dry inside—as dry, at anyrate, as I was likely to find anywhere.

I decided: and with a long look up the road, and a long look down the road, I drew an iron bar from the lining of my coat and forced the door, which was only held by a padlock and two staples. Inside, the darkness was damp and heavy: I struck a match, and with its haloed light I saw the black mouth of a passage somewhere ahead of me: and then it spluttered out. So I closed the door carefully, though I had little reason to fear passers-by at such a dismal hour in so remote a lane: and lighting another match, I crept down this passage to a little room at the far end, where the air was a bit clearer, for all that the window was boarded across. Moreover, there was a little rusted stove in this room: and thinking it too dark for any to see the smoke, I

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ripped up part of the wainscot with my knife, and soon was boiling my tea over a bright, small fire, and drying some of the day's rain out of my steamy clothes. Presently I piled the stove with wood to its top bar, and setting my boots where they would best dry, I stretched my body out to sleep.

I cannot have slept very long, for when I woke the fire was still burning brightly. It is not easy to sleep for long together on the level boards of a floor, for the limbs grow numb, and any movement wakes. I turned over, and was about to go again to sleep when I was startled to hear steps in the passage. As I have said, the window was boarded, and there was no other door from the little room—no cupboard even—in which to hide. It occurred to me rather grimly that there was nothing to do but to sit up and face the music, and that would probably mean being haled back to Worcester gaol, which I had left two bare days before, and where, for various reasons, I had no anxiety to be seen again.

The stranger did not hurry himself, but presently walked slowly down the passage, attracted by the light of the fire: and when he came in he did not seem to notice me where I lay huddled in a corner, but walked straight over to the stove and warmed his hands at it. He was dripping wet; wetter than I should have thought it pos-

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sible for a man to get, even on such a rainy night: and his clothes were old and worn. The water dripped from him on to the floor: he wore no hat, and the straight hair over his eyes dripped water that sizzled spitefully on the embers.

It occurred to me at once that he was no lawful citizen, but another wanderer like myself; a gentleman of the Road; so I gave him some sort of greeting, and we were presently in conversation. He complained much of the cold and the wet, and huddled himself over the fire, his teeth chattering and his face an ill white.

"No," I said, "it is no decent weather for the Road, this. But I wonder this cottage isn't more frequented, for it's a tidy little bit of a cottage."

Outside the pale dead sunflowers and giant weeds stirred in the rain.

"Time was," he answered, "there wasn't a tighter little cot in the co-anty, nor a purtier garden. A regular little parlour, she was. But now no folk'll live in it, and there's very few tramps will stop here either."

There were none of the rags and tins and broken food about that you find in a place where many beggars are used to stay.

"Why's that?" I asked.

He gave a very troubled sigh before answering.

"Gho-asts," he said; "gho-asts. Him that

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lived here. It is a mighty sad tale, and I'll not tell it you: but the upshot of it was that he drowned himself, down to the mill-pond. All slimy, he was, and floating, when they pulled him out of it. There are fo-aks have seen un floating on the pond, and fo-aks have seen un set round the corner of the school, waiting for his childer. Seems as if he had forgotten, like, how they were all gone dead, and the why he drowned hisself. But there are some say he walks up and down this cottage, up and down; like when the small-pox had 'em, and they couldn't sleep but if they heard his feet going up and down by their do-ars. Drownded hisself down to the pond, he did: and now he Walks."

The stranger sighed again, and I could hear the water squelch in his boots as he moved himself.

"But it doesn't do for the like of us to get superstitious," I answered. "It wouldn't do for us to get seeing ghosts, or many's the wet night we'd be lying in the roadway."

"No," he said; "no, it wouldn't do at all. I never had belief in Walks myself."

I laughed.

"Nor I that," I said. "I never see ghosts, whoever may."

He looked at me again in his queer melancholy fashion.

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"No," he said. "'Spect you don't ever. Some folk do-an't. It's hard enough for poor fellows to have no money to their lodging, apart from gho-asts sceering them."

"It's the coppers, not spooks, make me sleep uneasy," said I. "What with coppers, and meddlesome-minded folk, it isn't easy to get a night's rest nowadays."

The water was still oozing from his clothes all about the floor, and a dank smell went up from him.

"God! man," I cried, "can't you *never* get dry?"

"Dry?" He made a little coughing laughter. "Dry? I shan't never be dry . . . 'tisn't the likes of us that ever get dry, be it wet *or* fine, winter *or* summer. See that!"

He thrust his muddy hands up to the wrist in the fire, glowering over it fiercely and madly. But I caught up my two boots and ran crying out into the night.

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"THE night is dark and gloomy," said James, in a pompous voice; "let us be banal."

"That means," said Janet, "that you have a ghost-story you want to tell us."

James sat up suddenly and stared at her in mock consternation. Then he sank back again on the hearth-rug.

"You are right," he admitted.

We composed ourselves in sepulchral attitudes.

"The night was dark and gloomy . . ." he began.

"Cut . . . that . . . right . . . out!"—we sang in a crescendo chorus.

"The night was clear and cheerful. At any rate, it was night." He paused.

"Go on!"

"I was staying with my old friend . . . Thingummy. 'James,' he said, 'you won't mind sleeping in the Haunted Room, will you?' And I answered . . ."

"Yes, we all know what you answered," Janet interrupted; "that, of course, you weren't afraid, and didn't believe in ghosts."

"There you are wrong," said James. "I begged him, with tears, to put me in another room, and told him I was scared to death of them. So he rang for the Thirteenth Butler and

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told him to put me in the Victorian Room. That sounded quite modern and sort of homely: so although my teeth chattered loudly all along the passages, I felt quite reassured when I got there and found all the usual bell-pulls and red plush curtains and things. Grained furniture too: I could see it through the dressing-room door. So I hung my little glass up, and put my razor in the hot water, and prepared to shave."

Here James stood up, and struck a dramatic attitude and continued in a sing-song cantillation. To help him out we kept up an accompaniment of gentle groans.

"I had hardly set my hand to the razor to lift it out, when—happening to glance up—I saw, in the glass—on my bed—a jugulated corpse. Blood oozed over the pillows and sheets. Horror rippled over me in waves; for I saw that that grinning, twisted mask of a face on the pillow was my own!"

(Accompaniment here *ff*.)

"The room swam round me in great sweeping spirals. I tried to turn, to let go of my razor, to shriek; but I was paralysed!"

(Groans here a sympathetic *pp*.)

"The impotence of nightmare was upon me. My eyes were glued to the horrid, distorted sight in the glass. The Thing on the bed had me in thrall: I could not scream: I could not let go

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of the razor: I could not move it in the water.

"All at once I felt the force that held it there relax; it suddenly seemed to be lifted out without my aid. Out of the corner of my eye I could see my white, strained face in the glass; fear made the likeness to the Thing on the bed more ghastly. I stood impotent. A diabolical force gripped me; slowly I felt my right hand being raised. My muscles grew tense and quivered under the strain; slowly and surely the razor was lifted towards my throat. My hair rippled on to its ends, pricking like a cap of nettles; fear went over me in great waves, till I seemed drowning. Then my hand was drawn back over my shoulder, as if for a terrific slash, and I found myself praying to be allowed to do it quickly."

James paused again, and we urged him to go on.

"Well, that's really all. There was one little fact that both I and the ghost had rather overlooked, and which saved the situation. Thank Heaven it was a safety-razor Janet gave me last Christmas!"

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THE DIARY OF A STEERAGE PASSENGER

MONDAY

THIS is Babel. Except for German, I do not even know what languages I am hearing. Early in the morning we filed through a little hole in the ship's rusty side, and filtered gradually through dark passages into our proper quarters. Mine were in a little cubicle, barely six feet all ways, with bunks in it for three other men. There were three rows of these cubicles each side of the ship, with a shaft leading down to the hold in the middle: and having the good fortune to be berthed in one of the outermost of these, we enjoyed the luxury of ventilation, having a porthole to ourselves. The British passengers, of whom there were not many, were berthed together right aft: and the foreigners' quarters were not quite so commodious. We were close down to the waterline, and there was a noise and a throbbing underneath as if we were living over a water-mill.

The lights were not yet turned on, and in the dark passages there was a sort of mush of small children: you felt their hands warding you off as you went by. On deck there were others; and boys and old women in curious peasant dresses. The boat was still loading: desiccated

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cocoanut chiefly, I think, and net-load after net-load of passengers' luggage: so there was not much room on deck, and a great deal of din and dirt; and having breakfasted at six, I was hungry enough for dinner when the time came, as it did as soon as we had cast off from the dock.

I offended against etiquette that day by going in to dinner without my cap. It should not be removed till the soup arrives, I found; and put on again to show the steward you have finished. The food was unpleasant but plentiful.

The cigarette, too, should be worn behind the ear during meals; but it should be more carefully extinguished than mine was. The dining-room had all the appearances of luxury: I could imagine it making a most effective photograph when empty, with its beautiful white tablecloths and panelled walls; but crammed full of passengers after several days at sea, with the port-holes shut to keep the fog out, I could guess it would seem a very different affair. At present everything seemed very clean; but not likely to remain so long. Most of the foreigners were of the Peasant class: and though they were incomprehensible, I found them generally naïve and charming; but most of the Britishers came of the Respectable class, and were very ugly. However, I liked a rotund old cowboy who was ready to weep at the indignity of vaccination.

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" Just as if I was a babby," he said: they took and did it to him in the Customs Shed before they would let him on board; and though he had done his best to explain that he was a returning Canadian citizen, he was too roaring drunk at the time to be able to make them understand: so when I found him he was spitting on his arm and rubbing it vigorously with a red cotton handkerchief in the hope that the vaccine would not take. As for the doctor who had done it, there was no hope for him at all, neither in this life nor the next!

When I next met old Dad—as he soon got named on the ship—he was sober: and when sober there was something peculiarly sinister and malevolent about him. He had the power of being able to say " second class only here " in some nine or ten languages, and so procured himself quite illegitimate elbow-room. Later I was specially warned against him: they said he was a " Wrong 'Un, and a hard nut to crack, and didn't give nothing for nobody." But as he was never sober again during the trip, I only saw the better side of his character. In general shape and feature, though not, of course, in expression, he was rather reminiscent of the picture of W. H. Davies, by Laura Knight; especially he had the same erect forelock: and he had a genius for wangle, being an especial

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favourite with the stewards and officials. He had no legs—not real ones, that is to say, but a very efficient artificial pair—having lost them in the war.

I soon began to pick out other interesting passengers: a little Mexican boy with a sailor cap marked "Habana," who had already spat on three stewards undetected. I wondered if he would be caught before he reached Mexico: and indeed I think he was not, for he was still alive when we got to New York, though I had seen him spit on the Chief Officer himself: for he was very clever at it, and could spit in any direction—even over his shoulder without looking round. I wonder!

It is true that "I had dined to-day": but that does not render Fate powerless at sea—especially if the weather is at all choppy, as several folk were already beginning to find out.

When I went to bed I was confronted by a notice in many tongues that the fine for seduction was a hundred dollars.

TUESDAY

"*Who are the honestest people in the world?*" asked the Superior English Lady at breakfast, thinking she knew the answer.

"*All foreigners, Ma'am,*" answered the steward.

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The old women sit round the deck on their blankets, reading their Bibles, singing hymns, or moping in silence. Why was it Raemaecker moved us so with his drawings of refugees during the War? These have all that sullen, dynastic look. They are refugees of a sort too—from the Peace. They are Croats mostly, and Czechs, and Slovaks and Slovenes and Slavonians, and Ruthenians, and other remnants of the old Austrian Empire; with a sprinkling of Poles, Danes, Greeks, French, Rumanians, Germans, Russians, and I know not what else. German was the language talked most, with Hungarian a good second. The sunshine on that first morning at sea was blazing on the gulls' wings, and France was already a purple mist. We had woken in Cherbourg Harbour, and after breakfast mooched about the deck watching the rest of the passengers come aboard; and the little harbour steamers. There was one right under our stern: you could see the screw through the clear water begin to twist, and then a few seconds later it was hidden by the sudden volcano of water. Our own screws, when we started away, set up such a boiling and turmoil that it looked as if the swooping gulls would be caught and drowned in it.

There were more Central and Eastern Europeans who came on board here, and among them

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Herr Burghardt, an Austrian Jew. He was one of the most dapper little men I have ever seen: most beautifully dressed, with a little neat beard and a monocle: and with him were two dark frizz-haired flapper daughters in high tan boots. Directly he got aboard he lay down on his back on a hatchway and went to sleep, a white silk handkerchief spread over his face. The rest were chiefly old women and children; and one of the latter (for they began to play about almost at once) presently fell right upon Herr Burghardt's stomach. He sat up with a great yell, and, taking no notice of the child, fetched out a little pocket mirror and began to comb his beard and moustache, quite oblivious of people's laughter: which shows what sort of a man he was, and he was popular for the rest of the trip.

After we had passed the Channel Islands, I talked (for want of better to do) to a young man in a purple tweed cap, who was being sent out to an uncle in Canada. He was deploring that his uncle would not pay for him to go second. "It's all right for those that are used to hogging it," he confided to me; "but for a chap like me to get taken out of his class like this is blooming awful!" His name was Harald. Later he came back quite jubilant. He had climbed through the barrier and sat in the second-class lounge for fully half an hour, "without anyone

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suspecting I didn't belong there!" I think he felt better after that.

Race feeling at this time seemed to run pretty high: the few Britishers would make a frightful shindy if they were put to feed at the same table as the "dagoes"; and if the dago could talk English naturally the shindy was doubled. Harald—of the purple cap—was especially loud: and most of the women were at great pains to explain that they "didn't hold with foreigners." The interpreter had the life plagued out of him. By diving through sundry tunnels among the engines I worked my way forward, and found my way up in the bows, where is a second deck, where the Near Easterns and Central Europeans chiefly congregated. There you would find Hans, in an old Austrian tunic and cap; and the tragic old women being sea-sick, and children singing doleful-endless part-songs.

Before tea there was a fat steward—I discovered afterwards that he was weak in the head—who came on deck and made horrible faces at the children till they grew a little friendly: though, of course, they couldn't understand a word of his banter. One little girl even fitted a tin moustache to him. I gave them a few sweets, which frightened them very much. They made little bob-curtseys when they took the stuff; and I had to demonstrate to them that it

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was meant to be eaten: but after that they often used to run after me, calling out for "*zucker*." It was all gone then, but how could I explain? They must have thought me very stony-hearted.

I sat writing this up in the bows, perched on an iron girder. Beneath me Serbia and Austria waged internecine war, their long-range spitting being very effective: then they were interrupted by an old woman who deemed the battlefield the only place where she could be comfortably ill. I wish the poor things were not so easily affected: the sea was like an egg, but I suppose it was the ground-swell that did it. When they felt it coming on they took out hymn-books and sang till it happened. It was a wonderful evening—a hundred and twenty miles from land, and the gulls going home, and a tired bird roosting in the rigging, and suddenly a school of porpoises. "Wass ist das? Eitel! Sonja!" calls Hans. "Fisch! Fisch!" and they all stampede, crying "Ah! Ah! Aha!" at every leap. I had become acquainted, by the Esperanto of "*zucker*," with two little Serbian girls, and I watched them playing—a new game. One would cover her head with some of her many-coloured petticoats, and the other try to wipe her nose on it without being caught. Generally, they burst out into laughter before they got within effective range; but sometimes they were lucky.

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Somewhere under cover there sat a party of amorous Letts, drinking and chanting dolefully; and later they came out and danced slowly but extravagantly on the deck. There was not a cloud near the sky, and the low sun chiselling a silver line to our starboard bow; the sea a blue-black, and the sky the palest blue, but a cool breeze blowing. How I was enjoying it! But at times I got struck with a quite unreasoning terror, which was absurd; I suppose it was the feeling that I could not get out and walk: and also the uncanny dumb feeling of being alone among foreigners, of whose tongues I hardly knew the names even.

WEDNESDAY

As I had expected, the dirt was already beginning to settle. This was an old boat; only fit, some said, for cargo. I was told that on a recent trip they took twelve hundred third-class passengers, and that typhus was the result. The whole ship had to be fumigated as best they could. Indeed, we shall be lucky if we don't get an outbreak of some sort this trip: for you can't pack even so many of the unfortunates of the shadier races of Europe into an old and poisoned tin with impunity. But the fallacy of hearsay upon shipboard is notorious; and at least

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I accept no responsibility for this or any other rumour I may quote. So far the weather had been good: but the sight and smell of the open decks made me dread to think what life would be like if the weather forced us all to stay below. I went early that morning for a bath, but found it lined with a thick black grease; thick as tar, that I could not wash off my fingers: so I gave it up. My berth was rather stuffy in spite of the porthole, and I had woken with a headache.

This morning, however, we were all officially bathed and searched for lice; it took most of the day. Our bodies were carefully examined with a strong light, and our heads supposed to be scrubbed with soft-soap and paraffin. Meanwhile the men who did it told us terrible tales of the horrors of Ellis Island. Ellis Island had become the bogey of this boat. Everywhere you would hear it discussed; and we were divided into two classes—those who believed that we should be put there, and those who did not. No one really knew; and at the time I thought the tales I heard about it unbelievable. I think I could tell a few myself, now! But even the worst rumour-mongers regarded it as something of a joke. I remember hearing one woman telling her little girl that if she wasn't good Mummy would send her to Ellis Island. That was how

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we most of us looked on it: rather as the modern Christian thinks of Hell.

There was a great treat to-day: tripe for tea. The Company began to look up in their passengers' estimation. Considering that our fare had cost us nearly twenty pounds—a good deal more than the pre-war first-class charge—I think we had a right to such little amenities.[1] After tea I went forward with a young factory hand, Moor, and we played Puss in the Corner with the Czecho-Slovaks, with a Canadian-Jugo-Slav girl as interpreter. Then a young fireman brought his mandolin on deck, and sat up against a capstan with it, while the young folk danced and the old ones sat round clapping the time. They did waltzes and one-steps (but in a style very different to the English) and several curious dances that I had not seen before. There were two yellow-haired Hungarian flappers there, Marcsa and Rozsi, with their brother Sándor, who had been a prisoner in Russia most of the War; and Finns, and Danes, and Dutch; and two tiny Rumanians who ran about rolled in their blankets; with the Jugo-Slav girl, Thonka, acting as interpreter and general M.C. Rozsi and Marcsa had each a red cotton *tuch* on her head. When they grew tired of dancing we all

[1] But with German competition gone, the English companies can charge what they like.

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crowded round the musical fireman, and each sang the songs of his own Jerusalem: presently he struck up some songs that all knew; if it was a national anthem, every one sang it with equal zest—even the *Marseillaise* and *God Save the King*; though of the latter the English sailors sang some curious parody of their own.

At first I was not sure how deep this apparent internationalism went: the English, especially the women, treated all "square-heads" as dirt: to which they showed no apparent resentment: but I did not imagine that that would prevent them hating us at bottom. But, after all, once through the purgatory of Ellis Island, did not all alike expect to assume the halo of Good Americans? What feeling there is the more intelligent of them, such as Marcsa, Thonka, and the rest, deplored: and the absolute peasants found the whole life on the boat one of such luxury that it would take more than an occasional kick to disturb their delight in the halfpence.

After our evening biscuits we sang more songs round an old cracked piano till the stewards drove us out.

THURSDAY

We woke the next morning with a grey fog wisping through the portholes. The air was

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warm and sticky, and the decks and all iron-work streamed with moisture. I got up at half-past five as usual, and went for a bath, which had been cleaned. My hair had grown stiff as quills with all this salt water: but your polyglot is inclined to rub off, so I used to wash whenever possible. Though there were several hundred of us steerage passengers on board, I never found the bathroom occupied when I wanted to use it. Everything is done to bells; at 6.30 a bell to wake us, at 7.30 breakfast, at 12 dinner, at 5 tea; a separate bell for each sitting. Tea was the last meal of the day for us, so I often felt pretty empty by breakfast-time. The fog kept on all the morning: our hooter jammed, so we had to go dead slow: but at noon it cleared; everything dried up, and we had a fine afternoon with a rising wind. At tea I found a flea in the salt, at which Harald laughed loudly; but almost at once he found a cockroach in his tea, so the laugh went against him. After tea I went forward where the Hungarians were playing forfeits, to try and pick up a little Magyar.

This became my first introduction to Sári, a Hungarian village girl of curiously attractive ways, but no sense at all: only seventeen years old, and travelling alone from Budapest to Pittsburg. As I was standing by, Sándor ordered her (by way of forfeit) to beg, borrow, or steal

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my cigarette, then smoke it through. It had to be done in dumb-show; for she knew not a word of German, and I, at that time, only two or three. Afterwards I sat talking to the interpreting girl, Thonka, and to her cousin Pali—a funny little lad of sixteen, very dapper, but with a good sense of humour, to whom I talked Latin, Greek, and German mixed: for he was a student. At nine all women had to go to their quarters, so I went aft with Moor. He wanted me to come up on to the saloon deck with him and watch two card-sharpers he knew of; but I let him go alone, for he is a quarrelsome fellow when roused, and there was likely to be more trouble than I felt at the moment inclined for.

FRIDAY

Next day the decks were clearer, after a fairly rough night that lengthened the casualty list considerably. In the morning it rained heavily, so that I sat for some time on the fo'c'sle hatch yarning with a deck-hand; partly about my chances of working my passage back, partly about the white-slave traffic. A number of the women on board—he volunteered the information, though I don't know where he got it—were bound for Buenos Ayres in the latter end; some were being lured over with promises of employ-

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ment; others had been behind the Red Lamp before. He told me which, and this, at any rate, I afterwards found to be true. It is dangerous to believe a sailor when he is sober without verification, since prostitutes are an obsession with him. There is a little room, fitted like the inside of a bus, and much the same size, which is called the Third Class Lounge. The crew, he said, used to meet their women there at night, since there was a way into it both from the deck and from the dagoes' quarters. The Master-at-arms is supposed to be responsible for preventing this sort of thing: but, after all, he is a sailor himself.

I found the dining-room much emptier, but my own appetite was still dangerously increasing: I had got used to eating all sorts of wholesome and unappetizing things—such as cockroach tea. I heard that two cases of measles had broken out, and one of some kind of fever; so that we were in danger of quarantine.

There was a hot outer-darkness between the engine-room and the refrigerator-engines that was called the Square, and here I went after dinner. The only light was from a few dingy electric bulbs, so dim that their rays could hardly struggle from one to the other. Across the ceiling ran fat hot-water pipes, bearing steam to the winches fore and aft. These leaked, so that in many

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places there was a little jet of scalding water, and everywhere a cloud of steam. At one end the children were squabbling round the ice-bins; in another corner were the kennels; and you would have smelt the lavatories and wash-houses round worse if they had not been overpowered by the human stench, and the garlic. But in bad weather it was the only place to go, for the little lounge was hopelessly inadequate. There I found Thonka; and there, too, was Sári. Sári was crying; and Sándor, who was a good-looking enough young fellow, was comforting her. Soon she dried her eyes and they began to play, very prettily like two kittens: while I talked to Thonka and through her to Sándor's two sisters, Rozsi and Marcsa. Sometimes Sári pretended to run over to someone else, as if to make Sándor jealous: she sat on my knee for a while, but he was too cunning to resent it: and presently she ran right away, with him in pursuit, and I went and ate a great and glorious tea—two rank stockfish cakes, a huge plate of cold roast leather, and lots of bread, butter, and jam.

It was still raining; so after tea Moor found me in my haunt on the fo'c'sle hatch, and we gathered with Thonka, Marcsa, and Rozsi in the Square, where we got on very well until Moor declared that he hated the Germans, which the girls took to mean all German-*speaking* folk, and

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were accordingly offended. But reconciliation came soon, and I had a lesson both in the offending language and in Hungarian.

SATURDAY

I slept late: when I went after breakfast to get a bath I found all the hot taps and the plugs carefully removed. Kismet. I had a cold one instead, with my heel stuck in the waste-pipe. The rest of the day I spent on the language question: an hour's Danish, and the rest German and Hungarian. In German I could soon make myself understood, but Hungarian I found rather a tongue-twister: so that I made slow progress, though Sári had a Magyar-English phrase-book as well as highly expressive eyes. Just before tea a fireman and I played games with some of the raggedder children: and then I went down to tea to find a battle-royal raging: Harald and Co. objecting to "them filthy foreigners" standing at the door and putting him off his food. He told the Interpreter to send them away: and because the Interpreter refused there was a flare-up. Finally, one of the stewards kicked them out: but the Interpreter is in very bad odour as a result. As for the children, they can't make us out: some of us play with them and some of us catch them a clout, and they don't

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understand it. I was not sorry to go away forward again and talk broken German to little Herr Burghardt; and then make an amusing attempt to teach English to Sári over cocoa and ship's biscuit in the dining-room.

SUNDAY

Yesterday's entry was meagre enough, to-day's more so: for I began to feel that the eventual stage of the voyage was over: it had ceased to be an experiment. I knew the people, and I knew what to expect. The morning I spent talking German and Greek (I had to write the latter to be at all intelligible). Of Hungarian I had learnt enough to greet my friends; Danish I had let drop. The children have now lost all their shyness; it is amazing that they could change so quickly, and I was very soon tired out by them.

Tea—another treat to-day—saüerkraut, which I rather liked.

It is no wonder that America considers herself a nation: all these people, bar a few superior Britishers, are Americans already. An old filthy Greek, wearing a diamond ring of great value, explained it to me: "Speak me likee, me likee you—Serbish, Deutchish, English, Americano, yes." That is just about what it comes to.

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At night we all assembled in the Square; a various crew, crowded and crushed in the semi-darkness of the low open space, the engines roaring and the pipes steaming worse than ever. Somewhere in the crowd were two sailors, with a mandolin and a banjo. A tiny space was cleared, where we danced—Marcsa and Rozsi, Sári, Sándor, and the Drei Englander—Moor, a mate of Moor's (Cornet), and myself. The dancing was difficult, for one could not stand upright: and, moreover, I did not know the Hungarian style of dancing, which has plenty of swing and jerk; nor my partners the English, though Rozsi is evidently graceful, and had thoughts of becoming a ballerina if Sándor would have allowed it; and Sári could make nothing of it.

At nine, when the women were ordered below, we had not had enough, so went aft: where was a young Polish Jew, his face yellow and effortless, and the whole trip's stubble upon his chin, writhing an accordion, while the stewards jazzed with each other. I wished the girls had been there, to have seen what English dancing was like.

MONDAY

Tragedy: the little Sári!

She had been asking Marcsa questions about Sándor, and Marcsa had had to tell her that, of

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course, he was not serious : that he was engaged already, in fact. So when I went up forward to watch the whales spouting in the evening sunshine, I found her crying ; that was not uncommon ; but later I found her in a corner with Marcsa explaining vociferously in Hungarian, and Rozsi explaining, and Sándor explaining : so I asked Thonka for the rights of it. There was not one of us who had guessed she took him seriously ; for she was always one to have a dozen young polyglots hanging round her, and in their case it meant nothing. She had one of those faces which are pretty by being mobile, sensitive : faces not so much of character as of sensibility : and, like all young Hungarians, she had shapely and ivory shoulders. She was both too pretty and too silly to cross the world alone ; she knew not a word of English or German, and seemed incapable of learning either—nothing but Magyar and a smattering of Serbian, which would not carry her much further than the boat. But one could hardly call Sándor to blame ; it was a game, a pretty game.

TUESDAY

The next day was loaded with that atmosphere of slow sentiment with which all such Last Days are oppressed ; for we expected to reach Halifax

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within twenty-four hours, and there lose most of our friends. In the morning we saw nothing of Marcsa and Rozsi, for it was their turn to be loused; and when they reappeared their hair was so full of paraffin one could not go very close: so we all sat about in the Square, very dejected. Presently there passed through a party of second-class passengers, specially conducted, brought round to see how the lower orders lived. They had their handkerchiefs to their noses (for which I could hardly blame them): and they did not quite seem to know whether to be bored or disgusted. Moreover, they commented on us without any pretence at lowering their voices. Lord, how we did hate them! I did not see one of them who had the delicacy of voice or expression of even the dirtiest peasant on our deck. They were ugly to a fault, vulgar, and bored—bored. There was one fat man with a patent cigar—an American saloon-keeper I believe he was, and he rolled it expressively from one mouth-corner to the other, who lingered behind to roll his eyes at Sári; so Moor and I jabbered some sort of "bat" to each other, as if we were quarrelling about her, and presently pulled out knives and pretended to fight: on which he went hastily away. Then, to our surprise, up jumps Marcsa, scarlet in the face, and rushes off. What was it? We sent Thonka to her: and Thonka came

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back to say that Marcsa had sworn never to speak to us again. She got it into her head that we were ashamed to be heard talking German by the saloon passengers, and no other explanation of what was meant as quite a harmless trick would she accept! At first, Rozsi thought the same; but her Thonka managed to persuade.

In the afternoon it was Thonka's turn for the paraffin bath, so the rest of us were left to our own wits, without an interpreter; and we managed fairly well. When Thonka came back we discussed the Balkans, and projected a visit for me there. Presently one of the crew produced a pair of boxing-gloves, and we made a little ring on the deck. The old women and the children cheered with delight; for there were some cunning boxers among the firemen, as well as men of great strength. The old women sat in tiers on the hatchways in their curious brilliant clothes, and the little boys swarmed in the rigging. I had a couple of rounds with Moor, but we were not near enough of a weight; and Sándor could not box. But presently they took two of the small Serbian boys and set them to fighting together, which was one of the funniest things I have seen.

But it was not till after supper that the fun really began, when we went aft and danced to the Jew's accordion. The women were allowed

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on deck for an extra hour, and after awhile we persuaded little Herr Burghardt to do jigs with his frizz-haired daughter; and presently Sári emerged from hiding and did an exhibition one-step with one of her more objectionable flames. I danced with Rozsi chiefly, but with Sándor himself once, who was excellent; and though the space on the deck was hardly twenty feet by five, and studded with iron rings, and the ship was pitching, we managed to enjoy ourselves considerably. But Marcsa would not appear.

WEDNESDAY

We ran into a fog in the night which lasted nearly all day and made it impossible to get into Halifax before the next night. So the intolerable process of farewell was prolonged for another day. The afternoon wound itself slowly undone; alternate sunshine and fog, boredom and flirtation. The children were bored too, and I got far too hot playing with them. Only once did anything amusing occur, and that not till after tea, when a game was organized; primitive, but not without a spice of excitement. One man had to bend down, and guess who it was in the crowd that spanked him: if he was right, the other fellow took his place. A chap from the saloon deck leant over the rail and spanked

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Sándor with a long board; but he did not draw it up again in time, and Sándor spotted him. He was made to come down and take his turn. Then Tiny the Champion Stoker—seven feet, seventeen stone of bone and muscle—smote him, and with one blow split his trousers in three places, for he had the hand of a hippopotamus. Crude, perhaps: but we could not easily help enjoying it, though the poor fellow had to be helped away.

THURSDAY

I woke at three to find us moored in Halifax harbour; a big, dingy expanse of water, with natural breakwaters where factories and pine-trees fought each other. We breakfasted at six, and at nine the Jugo-Slav girls went ashore, and Sándor. So: Good-bye to them, and away south in a dense fog that we found waiting for us as soon as we got to sea. Halifax docks are a thing of horror, but the south of the harbour, which is several miles out, is quite pleasant: low rocky headlands covered in pines, with jolly little sailing-boats and canoes going about amongst them. I had now the luxury of my cubicle to myself; for my berthing companions had gone ashore: but Moor and Cornet, and Sári too, were still on board.

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FRIDAY

During the night we made quite good time, but were put back for hours by boiler trouble again. The morning was gorgeous; sun, a high wind, and a high sea. Both continued to rise, till the waves were breaking right up on to the deck. I saw one catch the interpreter, and soak him through: then later I was caught by one myself, coming aft from sitting at the fo'c'sle hatch: so I had to spend the afternoon drying myself in the sun and wind, for I had not a change of clothes. After lunch we passed through a little fishing fleet: they were bobbing on the water like wee leaves. This is a steady boat—it is about her only virtue—but she bucked now like a stallion. I fell to wondering what sort of a chance a man overboard would get this weather. The curlers from our bows showed six feet deep of roaring green foam with the spring of a tiger.

SATURDAY

This afternoon, at last, we reached New York —late, even for this old tub. First we moored on the quarantine ground, and the doctors came on board. We were all stripped to the waist on the after-deck, examined, formed in line, marched

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past and re-examined. Presently they passed the ship, and we steamed—oh, mockery !—past the Statue of Liberty, to the docks. There the second-class passengers, and the few American citizens among the third, went on shore in the evening. We were berthed in a narrow dock, with a Customs shed one side, and a few feet off on the other an Italian boat that had already been stewing there several days waiting its turn for Ellis Island. The immigrants on board it gave us an ironical welcome as we arrived. We were all in the last stages of depression—so near, and yet liable to be held up *sine die*.

SUNDAY

The night was as hot as hell ; in my bunk I could not bear a rag of clothing on me, and sat all day in a shirt and trousers, unable almost to move. The stewards and crew got some sort of pleasure from swimming about the dock ; but the water was thick and stinking with the drainage from two such big boats ; and for bathing-raft, moreover, they used a coal-barge. In the evening some of us went on shore for a few hours. There are two ways of compassing this : one, the difficult and expensive way of bribery ; the other, which is neater, safer, and cheaper alike, for quite obvious reasons I cannot explain here,

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for it depends on an accidental oversight of the authorities which they could easily rectify. One of the sailors gave me the hint, when he explained how they had once smuggled a young American ashore who had lost his citizenship by serving in the British Army. The risk of detection was not very great, but the penalty likely to be severe. But the rest of us were too hot for even so much display of energy.

I doubt if I had ever been so hot in my life before: with the dock on one side and the Italian steamer the other, not a breath of air could reach the portholes. From nine till five you could not bear yourself, and in the dining-room the air was such that you could hardly eat and needed a rub down after every meal. The feeding, moreover, deteriorated as soon as we got into dock: every day we were kept on board was dead loss to the Company, and they let us know it. The stewards were, on the whole, a very nice lot of fellows; but naturally they could not help being a bit surly at being kept on board to look after us. The evening biscuits were knocked off, which left us with absolutely no food between tea and breakfast—fourteen hours.

I had this morning the pleasure of assisting at the smuggling of a little whisky—assisting in the French sense. It is no easy matter, for not only would the authorities not allow you to send

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anything on shore, but they would not even allow messages, letters, or telegrams to be brought on board: so that the wretched prisoners on the boat could not even communicate with their friends to let them know they had arrived, and get themselves claimed at the Island.

The afternoon I spent writing, and so passed it fairly quickly, though I was sweating on to the pages, and getting bitten by all manner of mosquitoes and flies.

MONDAY

Another boiling day: and things, if anything, worse, as they were coaling the ship one side, unlading it the other: we were crowded together on a small part of the deck, with the coal-dust drifting over us and the mosquitoes biting madly: not a breath of air, nor room to breathe it. If I was to call it hell, I should be understating the case; to be accurate, it would be necessary to pick my words. The decks were not cleaned when the coaling was ended for the night; they were left covered with the debris of three days. How could I write up my diary properly? I could do nothing—not even think, or get angry—I was just comatose. The children were wonderful: I suppose it is their hard upbringing, but I did not see one of them out of patience

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nor fractious the whole of the trip—not one of the foreign children, that is to say. Most of the English children these days (there were not many English still on board) had to be smacked into a state of stupor.

TUESDAY

This last was the hottest night of all. I got up soon after four, and at six we breakfasted, the room already as hot as a bread-oven. By 7.30 we were sitting on our baggage in the Customs shed; but the inspectors arrived late, so we were held up again. That business over, we were herded into a sort of two-story cattle-boat and the doors locked. There we were left for some time; but presently a tug arrived and towed us over to Ellis Island. As we started:

"That's a dandy load of manure you got to-day, Pete," said a friend to the tug-man; and that is pretty well what we felt like. It is a crime to want to enter the United States: and by that time I was beginning to feel that it was also a lunacy. At any rate, you are treated as a criminal: and we were already so thoroughly cowed by the treatment we had had that we were ready to accept anybody's estimate of us without rancour. On the Island itself they do not waste words; if they want you to do anything or go

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anywhere, they pull, hit, or kick you accordingly. Of most of the immigration officials I came across I could not find anything too bad to say —even allowing for the unpleasant nature of their job. There are, of course, exceptions; I am speaking of the general run of them. Some of them seemed hardly to be able to talk English, or, at any rate, talked it with an almost unintelligible Italian or German accent. First we were made to strip, and were medically examined again; then, before we had time to put our clothes on properly, we were knocked into a large central hall, where we sat malodorously till noon, when we were given a little coffee and a ham-sandwich—very good, indeed, but small—and at one o'clock I was examined. I had no difficulty in getting passed: they then labelled me, and chucked me here and there awhile: finally, back into the cattle-boat affair, and I was again ferried to the docks, and locked into a shed to wait for a train.

But at three a large, fat, silent man came for me, looked at my label, led me to a railway station and put me on one of their comic trains —free at last! It started, and I grew amazed simply by looking through the windows. I must have gaped like a zany: at the slap-dash houses, the odd flowers: the promiscuous way the train had of running through any and everything with-

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out fences or gates; and, most of all, the glass insulators on the telegraph-posts.

And so I arrived at last; but meanwhile X, with whom I was to stay, had been spending the last few days in New York trying to meet me, unable to get news of me, or even to get a message on board to me at the docks, and not allowed on to Ellis Island until the day after I left it. I think he had a worse time waiting about than I had.

I shall not easily forget the last sight I had of the Island: not the front view which the post cards show you, but the back view from the ferry-boat, looking across ash-piles to a vast window where there were immigrants waiting to be deported in hundreds, among the latest additions to whom was poor little Sári. With most of them their only crime was that they exceeded their country's immigration ration for the current month.

As for the country, I found it difficult to believe at first that I was in America. It only seemed a place where there were a few more Americans than there are in other parts of the world.

THE END

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